THE CRAFT OF LITERATURE

W. E. WILLIAMS

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PREFACE

IN this book the historical sequence of English literature is used as a background for a study of the technique of the chief literary modes. This purpose has inevitably compelled the omission of any reference to some writers whose work, although of great intrinsic value, has not contributed in any pronounced degree to the development of literary forms. Since, however, the greatest authors have been innovators as well as traditionalists, the work of the majority of them has necessarily been considered in this survey.

For permission to quote copyright poems I am very grateful to these poets and publishers :—Mr. Walter de la Mare and Messrs. Constable (for *Silver* from *Collected Poems*) ; Mr. Ralph Hodgson and Messrs. Macmillan (for *Eve* from *Poems*) ; Mr. A. E. Housman and Messrs. Grant Richards (for *Eight O'Clock* from *Last Poems*) ; Mr. Harold Monro and The Poetry Bookshop (for *Children of Love*) ; Messrs. Martin Secker (for *The Old Ships* from *Collected Poems*) ; Mr. John Freeman and Messrs. Selwyn and Blount (for *It was the Lovely Moon* from *Stone Trees*) ; Messrs. Methuen (for *The Moon* from Mr. W. H. Davies's *The Bird of Paradise*).

The deficiencies of this book would have been greater than they are but for the advice and criticism which my wife has given me during its composition. Mr. M. Gompertz, Mr. W. N. Hills, and Mr. R. W. Crammer have also helped me by their comments on some sections of the manuscript.

W. E. W.

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TO G.

THE CRAFT OF LITERATURE

CHAPTER I

LITERATURE AND THE OTHER ARTS

I

AMONG parlour games of the more refined sort there is one that consists of cataloguing the several forms of expression which may be given to any feeling such as happiness. Naturally, as this is a pastime for the parlour, it is not necessary to give a clear definition of our term happiness before we begin. The meaning of the word emerges from the examples of happiness that we discover. Thus we set it down that Noah, happy to walk the earth again, "built an altar to the Lord"; that Pan played on his pipes because Spring made him happy; or that Shakespeare, remembering happy days in Stratford woods, wrote *Under the Greenwood Tree*.

When all the emotions are catalogued, we may make a list of the possible ways of expressing an *idea* such as that of Liberty: the music of the Marseillaise, the Statue of Liberty outside New York harbour, or Shelley's *Ode to Liberty*.

However lightly we play the game we are bound to discover that feelings or ideas are capable of expression through one or other of the Arts—Architecture, Painting, Sculpture, Music, Literature, Dancing—as well as through many other forms, which, although they may have sincerity, the first essential of an art, yet lack the imaginative power that can fix ideas and emotions into some permanent shape in stone, bronze, paint, melody, verse, or prose.

The kinship of the arts is often considered as being more than that of subject-matter alone. Thus both poetry and music appeal to the ear, painting and poetry both present pictures. But too close a relationship between literature and

these other arts should not be insisted upon. Born of the same parents, Literature is a child with an appearance and a character of its own. It is useful, and it is suggestive, to speak of the architecture of Macaulay's prose, or of the swelling organ-music of Milton. But the parallels too far forced will break down; for sentences are not rigid as buttresses, nor words as mechanical in their effects as stops.

Literature is to be examined, then, as an art, similar to the rest of the arts in its power to express whatever in human thought and experience the artist wants to communicate, but as an art with a scope and technique of its own.

Although the subject-matter of every art is taken from one source, from Life—from the world we know, from the world of things seen or thought or imagined or felt—yet each art communicates a given idea in a different way, different both in appeal and in power. Imagine a river scene at twilight, a boat drifting slowly downstream, the oarsman resting on dripping oars. Could that scene be best communicated by the painter, by the musician, or by the poet? Which of the arts could get nearest to the idea of life moving softly through the quietness of evening? Could the horror of the fate of Lot's wife be better conveyed to us by the sculptor or by the story-teller? If an etcher had been with Wordsworth upon Westminster Bridge would he have preserved for us a better picture of sleeping London than the poet's?

What at first may seem a better representation is, however, only a different one. There is no hierarchy of the arts. Each works in a different material, with different tools; and whatever we may find inadequate in one of them is balanced by some excellence which is missing from another. So, if the story-teller cannot fully convey the idea of the instantaneous transformation of Lot's wife, yet his words have more power than the sculptor's stone to make the incident linger in our memory: "Remember Lot's wife!" The painter, in line and colouring, may give a better picture than Tennyson's—

> "On either side the river lie
> Long fields of barley and of rye
> That clothe the wold and meet the sky,
> And through the field the road runs by
> To many tower'd Camelot."

But he cannot achieve the clean, hard, consonantal magic of the recurring "Many tower'd Camelot."

From the dawn of history man has been impelled to express his emotions and thoughts, and to pass on those expressions to others. The history of art is the story of the discovery and training of new means of expression. Always from the one impulse have come new or varying manifestations of it. The ancient dance-ritual round the camp fire bore witness to that impulse no less than does Shelley's poetry. And through all the developments of all the arts the subject-matter and the "will to express" have not varied. It is an impulse that made itself felt long before man had security or wealth. In his forest home where life was hard to preserve and difficult to sustain, he had the need to dance, to draw, to chant. One mode of expression did not long satisfy; other modes, other arts developed; and as the fight with destructive forces grew less immediate, opportunities were greater for practice and experiment. Each of the arts makes its own appeal in its own way; but all of them minister to the craving of man to get beyond the necessities of feeding and fighting, beyond building and hunting, to that condition where he can create something that may be of no immediate *use*, but which satisfies mind and spirit.

The subject-matter of literature, as of all the arts, is the stuff of life itself. In literature, life, "like a dome of many-coloured glass," is seen from all angles. It covers the whole breadth, depth, and diversity of life, it voices the experience of men in all situations and at all times. Things seen, felt, thought or imagined, worlds known, or lost, or hoped for. All this is the range of literature; to which our study in this book, concerning itself rather with *forms* of expression, must always be subsidiary. The subject-matter of literature can be only incidentally discussed in these pages where no more will be attempted than to furnish the student with a critical apparatus for the study of literary form, so that, reading the Masters, he may realise that their inspiration and their thought are expressed through a carefully devised technique. But he must be warned that this critical equipment will never be enough to give him the kinship with the Immortals that the Muses grant only to the reader of discernment and imagination.

II

In a study of method we should be careful to avoid the delusion that literature is nothing more than form or style.

Each great writer brings to his work, first and foremost, a personality that stamps his books with a private seal, that makes them in one way or another different from other men's books. Whatever subject he chooses to write upon, or whatever branch of his craft he practises, the Man will reveal himself in all he writes. Shakespeare's scorn and passion burst out a hundred times from characters that are the puppets of his deepest thoughts, Bunyan writes unconsciously a commentary on himself in *The Pilgrim's Progress*, Carlyle's page glows with the reflection of his fiery personality, every tale that Conrad wrote manifests his sensitiveness to all heroic endeavour and tragic failure.

The following poems are all on the same theme, but the reader may, by a comparative study of them, discover how the outlook and temperament of each poet has given a distinctive and intimate expression to a subject-matter that was more or less common to all of them. Each of these passages tells us as much about its author as it does about the Moon.

(1) Walter de la Mare. *Silver.*

"Slowly, silently, now the moon
Walks the night in her silver shoon;
This way and that she peers and sees
Silver fruit upon silver trees;
One by one the casements catch
Her beams beneath the silvery thatch;
Couched in his kennel, like a log,
With paws of silver sleeps the dog;
From their shadowy cote the white breasts peep
Of doves in a silver-feathered sleep;
A harvest mouse goes scampering by,
With silver claws and a silver eye;
And moveless fish in the water gleam,
By silver reeds in a silver stream."

(2) W. H. Davies. *The Moon.*

"Thy beauty haunts me heart and soul,
Oh thou fair Moon, so close and bright;
Thy beauty makes me like the child,
That cries aloud to own thy light:
The little child that lifts each arm
To press thee to her bosom warm.

Though there are birds that sing this night
With thy white beams across their throats,
Let my deep silence speak for me
More than for them their sweetest notes:
Who worships thee till music fails
Is greater than thy nightingales."

(3) John Freeman. *It was the lovely Moon*

"It was the lovely moon—she lifted
Slowly her white brow among
Bronze cloud-waves that ebbed and drifted
Faintly, faintlier afar.
Calm she looked, yet pale with wonder,
Sweet in unwonted thoughtfulness,
Watching the earth that dwindled under
Faintly, faintlier afar.
It was the lovely moon that lovelike
Hovered over the wandering, tired
Earth, her bosom grey and dovelike,
Hovering beautiful as a dove . . .
The lovely moon:—her soft light falling
Lightly on roof and poplar and pine—
Tree to tree whispering and calling,
Wonderful in the silvery shine
Of the round, lovely, thoughtful moon."

(4) Shelley. *The Waning Moon.*

"And like a dying lady, lean and pale,
Who totters forth, wrapped in a gauzy veil,
Out of her chamber, led by the insane
And feeble wanderings of her fading brain,
The moon arose up in the murky East,
A white and shapeless mass——"

(5) Keats. From *Endymion.*

"O Moon! old boughs lisp forth a holier din
The while they feel thine airy fellowship.
Thou dost bless everywhere, with silver lip
Kissing dead things to life. The sleeping kine
Couch'd in thy brightness, dream of fields divine:
Innumerable mountains rise, and rise,
Ambitious for the hallowing of thine eyes;
And yet thy benediction passeth not
One obscure hiding-place, one little spot
Where pleasure may be sent: the nested wren
Has thy fair face within its tranquil ken,
And from beneath a sheltering ivy leaf
Takes glimpses of thee;"

III

In later chapters certain objective standards are proposed by which we may examine whatever we read; certain agreed passwords which are to be demanded and received before we can admit any piece of work into "Literature." But "Style" and "Construction" are not alone the measures of Literature; and a knowledge of the mechanics of verse and of the figures of speech will not equip a reader for the dis-

covery of literature. The collective experience of Englishmen has admitted various writings into a kind of residuum which we call Literature. The application of these objective standards has, by a common consent of criticism, enabled us to inherit all those works that are called English Literature. Upon this inherited residuum—into which modern criticism, applying these same standards, has distilled the best of modern work—the individual reader makes other tests. The subjective standard is that which intimately lights up the reader's own personality. Common consent admits Shakespeare and Wordsworth to Literature : individual taste, while sharing this consent, may reject a particular play or sonnet. This difference within the bounds of the general agreement is the token of an emancipated judgment, and therefore the achievement of a personal standard.

This subjective test is one that, for most students, is always developing. What satisfied formerly will by to-morrow be inadequate. For the purposes of a calf lover any of those calf-bound doggerel " Poems of Passion " serve as literature—i.e. as the expression of things we feel but cannot as adequately say. The developing experience of that raw lover may demand some fuller and deeper expression—so that presently he hides away his copy of the tender drivel, and finds satisfaction only in Shakespeare or Browning. Failing that development, Literature must for him continue to mean those suède-bound mewings that annually serve to call many thousand fools into a ring, and on the prose side, the latest incredible novel that " publicity " can foist off on the innocents who flood the subscription libraries.

In the last resort, Literature is something relative ; and each of us is a potential anthologist, ready to select his hundred best passages from the bulk of his reading. Study and enlightenment will bring us to a general agreement as to what are the objective standards of Literature : our intimate confessions of what Literature really means to us will always be revealed in our favourite authors and quotations.

Our immediate business is to set up standards by which we may judge the claim of any piece of work to be admitted to this residuum which is called English Literature, and from which, on subjective standards, we choose our own (unwritten) anthologies.

Here are two extracts which may serve as a first test of

the reader's capacity to appreciate literature. *Even if he cannot say why one is better, he should be able to say which is better.*

(1) "One year has passed since that sad day,
When one we loved was called away.
God took her home; it was His will,
Forget her?—No, we never will."

(2) "They shall not grow old,
As we that are left grow old;
Age shall not wither them,
Nor the years condemn;
At the going down of the sun
And in the morning
We will remember them."

The choice of the better passage may now be rationalised by the following considerations:—

I. (*a*) The quotations deal with the same theme.

(*b*) Each may be assumed to be the product of a genuine emotion.

(*c*) Each is simply expressed.

BUT

II. (*a*) The form of the first is cast-iron, too prim in metre and rime for so majestic a theme.

(*b*) Simplicity of diction must not be confused with commonplace diction. "Sad day," "called away," "took her home" are *clichés*, phrases which have been clipped and defaced by base use. The words of the second piece are of Scriptural beauty, preserved from contamination and decay by the rich associations of such a classic as the Authorized Version; for Literature is like a museum or sarcophagus where a word as simple as a flint may, by the power of association, retain its power to kindle in our minds pictures of lost worlds.

(*c*) The last line of the first piece is catastrophic—again because of associations. At once there springs to mind the parallel, "Are we downhearted? No!"

(*d*) The second passage is concrete: Age is presented as a real, visible force. And there is vivid concreteness in such phrases as "At the going down of the sun." The first sample gives no picture at all, neither of the "sad day" nor of "God" nor of "home": all is vague and woolly.

(*e*) Finally the second extract has the authentic note of lamentation : the echo of repetition.

IV

" Literature," we have seen, must remain to some extent a term of convenience ; and we can more easily name its characteristics than we can define it. The anonymous songs and ballads that are included in our miscellanies to represent the earliest periods of English Literature were preserved by our ancestors because they were the best products of their age. Whatever they found memorable was cherished ; whatever was recognised as being a finer expression than the rest of the community could write was kept and bequeathed. The process suggests a rough-and-ready first test for our own criticism—whatever strikes us as being an expression of things we feel but cannot as adequately say, has at least one of the basic qualities of literature in so far as it is likely to linger in our memory. In the same way a work that may reveal its writer's sincerity may yet dissatisfy us because we feel it falls below our own power of expression and utterance. It fails to move us ; it cannot haunt us. We have often enough seen the shepherd driving home his weary flock, yet we recognise that we never had the power to say

> " Softly along the road of evening,
> In a twilight dim with rose,
> Wrinkled with age and drenched with dew,
> Old Nod, the Shepherd, goes."

But Wordsworth's description of Simon Lee is in parts poorer than one we feel we ourselves could make ; it fades from the mind as soon as we read it.

> " And he is lean and he is sick ;
> His body dwindled and awry,
> Rests upon ankles swoln and thick ;
> His legs are thin and dry.
> One prop he has, and only one,
> His wife, an aged woman,
> Lives with him near the waterfall,
> Upon the village common."

Here, as in the earlier examples, the failure of the bad verse is chiefly due to its inflexible rhythm and its drab diction. It passes beyond the infelicitous to the ludicrous : " one prop he has, and only one." The disaster is completed by the booby-

prize rime of lines six and eight. *Nod*, on the other hand, has an elusive, elastic rhythm, easy unstrained rimes, and felicitous epithets; above all else, it has the indefinable "atmosphere" without which Poetry dies and leaves only its skeleton, Verse.

CHAPTER II

WORDS, IMAGERY, AND RHYTHM

(N.B.—Every poem in this and subsequent chapters should be read *aloud*.)

I

COLERIDGE'S definitions of prose and poetry, however limited, present the first principles of literature—prose as "words in their best order," poetry as "the best words in their best order." These phrases illustrate one or two simple truths that are axiomatic in a study of literature:

(1) That words as the symbols of thought are the raw materials out of which literature is made.

(2) That the arrangement of the words is as important as the choice of words.

At the same time these definitions indicate a point of view that will be challenged, partly in so far as they maintain the principle of difference between poetic diction and that of prose; and partly in so far as they appear to overlook the fundamental truth that Literature is more than the mechanics of writing.

Coleridge's description[1] of the materials of prose and of poetry—"words" and "best words" respectively—provokes many questions. What are the best words? What standard of classification can be found? Is the prose writer simply to take less pains to find the best word than the poet? Are words of common use to be excluded from poetry?

Literature has its conventions; and literary conventions, although of intrinsic value, are often stumbling-blocks to progress. So if we ask why certain words are excluded from poetry we shall see that their offence is not in themselves but

[1] Cf. Emerson, quoted p. 40.

in their associations. They have not been used to the elegances of poetic usage; they have no patrician origins. They have been the labourers, employed on rough workaday jobs. There is no democracy of words; and a word without a family history, be it never so comely, finds it hard to gain acceptance in the most exclusive circles of literature.

It may be that snobbery excludes words, simply because they are of working-class origin or plebeian dress; and in some modern poetry an excess of democratic zeal flaunts these very words before a shocked public. Conservatism and radicalism may both tend to overlook the real tests of admission:—Does a word convey something beyond an immediate meaning? Has it a personality? Has it suggestiveness? Does it produce either a sound or a picture that lingers in the mind? If it does these things, its pedigree need not be sought.

The words of the English language are a national inheritance, the accumulated wealth of successive generations. This metaphor, however, suggests that language is static. Language is rather a natural process of growth and assimilation. At some times in English history the process has gone on more quickly than at other times, until a standard language was evolved. From that time growth has been slower; and it may possibly be that a language, like a human being, eventually reaches an age beyond which it must decline into senility and decay. The rapid expansion of England up to Tudor times is reflected in the swift adolescent growth of the English language. The Anglo-Saxon tongue—itself of remote origin—of those who conquered the Celts (and absorbed words of their defeated enemy's language) has been built up into modern English by many kinds of external nourishment. Christianity, brought from Rome, brought also new words; the Norman Conquest set up a coalition of languages between Saxon and French. War, travel, and commerce have each added words to the national language.

This process has continued as unconsciously as human growth itself. But that a point is reached when this growth slows down is indicated when the language of Shakespeare is compared with that of the present century. Roughly speaking, literature begins when a standard speech has been evolved from all the preceding centuries of accretion and assimilation; and, for this reason, English literature begins with Chaucer.

II

In handling words many considerations have to be met. A word is not simply a symbol that calls up some idea into the mind; it may evoke also a certain atmosphere or background against which the idea is placed. There is yet another peculiarity about words; for a word, even if not spoken aloud, has an echo of its actual sound about it even when it lies printed on the page of a book. The printed word in literature serves the same purpose as notation in music—it is there to indicate a certain sound. Words may become sound only, giving the speaker or the hearer a purely æsthetic sensation, as when one repeats some fantastic place name like "Hesperides" or some nonsense jingle about a "Jabberwock." Sometimes a word conveys to us nothing but a meaning, as in the average conversation of the average man. And words may refuse a meaning while by their sound and atmosphere they enchant us with a vision of

> "Magic casements, opening on the foam
> Of perilous seas, in faery lands forlorn."

These three virtues that words possess must not be regarded as their natural endowment. The meaning or the satisfaction they convey are due to centuries of use and innovation that have clustered about words this wealth of association and atmosphere. The primitive language-maker with a purely utilitarian purpose gave words meaning: the Poet gave them atmosphere. Did its originators ever find in the word "lonely" the compelling power that centuries of use have given it for us?

The study of changes in the meaning of words is a branch of philology, and therefore is outside the scope of this book; but the student who follows up this line of exploration will be taken into literature along a by-path of absorbing interest.

III

The maker of literature, the Poet in the widest meaning of that word, has at his disposal the whole vocabulary of his national language. The selection from this of words that have the *meaning* he wants to convey is his easiest task. The quality that makes him Poet is his power to choose from this mass the exact word or combination of words that will also convey the atmosphere in which those meanings must be

accepted by his readers and listeners. Shakespeare had to find words that would tell us that Antony was at the point of death. He had also to bring poignantly to his audience the mood of that moment—the fall of Imperial splendour—"I am dying, Egypt, dying."[1]

The power of the Poet depends largely on his ability to endow the symbols of thought and feeling (i.e. words) with the exact association he wants to convey. Some classification of his ways of doing this will best guide the student into this first principle of literary appreciation.

Epithet: An epithet is a word that characterises the person or object described. In literature it is a wand that can instantly produce a picture of some object or person or state or event. It lends to all the other words in its neighbourhood a colour that makes the whole sentence or line reveal some clear picture to the mind. A successful epithet *compels* attention, making us pause until we have made in our minds all the possible pictures that it suggests. Shakespeare's work alone would provide sufficient examples of this wizardry in words—

> "Rough winds do shake the *darling* buds of May."

A word that instantly fills the mind with suggestions of frail infancy; an exhaustive metaphor in a single word.

> "Crabbèd age and youth cannot live together."

The whole sum of the physical and mental blemishes of Old Age is contained in a word.

> "Two chantries where the sad and solemn priests
> Sing still for Richard's soul."

Common words somehow invested with perfect significance.

> "Chanting faint hymns to the cold fruitless moon."

—words as pure, luminous, and cold as the idea they express.

> "Yet here she is allowed her virgin crants,
> Her maiden strewments and the bringing home
> Of bell and burial."

[1] "It summons up with a sudden significance all the mystery and splendour personated in the woman for whom he has gambled away the world and all the earthly glories that are fading into the darkness of death." (A. G. Gardiner.)

A magic achieved by a blend of familiar epithets with words of haunting strangeness.

> " I'll to thy closet; and go read with thee
> Sad stories *chancèd* in the times of old."

A word that, to a hairbreadth, falls perfectly in its place. These examples illustrate one of the first characteristics of a fine epithet—economy; and this quality is closely associated with the complementary one of simplicity. As soon as an epithet appears laborious or strained it loses power; if it fails to move us *instantly*, to *flash* pictures to the mind, it suffers a corresponding loss in effectiveness. At the same time, the very novelty of a word used in a certain connection may hinder this spontaneity of impression.

> " The balancing of gaudy broad pavilions
> Of Summer against the *insolent* breeze."

Or Ruth " in tears amid the *alien* corn," or Coleridge's " *rotting* sea." Such an epithet may not at once be appreciated, but on reflection its appropriateness cannot fail to be realised. An epithet of this kind,—a " transferred " epithet—runs obvious risks. It challenges custom, takes liberties with recognised usages. The very novelty of its use in a connection different from the one familiar to us may at first offend our sense of decorum; but, finally, if the epithet is really apt, the boldness of the transference will deepen the effect of its use. It is a risk that every use of metaphor must run. The unusual is in some degree always startling; but it should never be inappropriate to the matter in hand. It must not be forgotten, moreover, that transferred epithet will be considered appropriate or not, according to the experience or tastes of the individual reader. The simple epithet, the familiar word used familiarly at the right moment in the right place, will be universally admired. The transferred epithet may or may not please. Thus the present writer cannot share a fairly widespread satisfaction with the line

> " The *wrinkled* sea beneath him *crawls*."

The epithets there do not suggest to his mind the seas he has watched; they insistently remind him of a decrepit beggar.

Economy and simplicity mark the best epithets; and a good line may often be marred by a writer's inability to stop

when he should, by a piling-up of words that overbalances the effect. Thus the epithets in the following passage are too botanically exact; nothing is left to the imagination; the picture is too fully and faithfully drawn—

> "Through the *thick* corn the *scarlet* poppies creep
> And round *green* roots and *yellowing* stalks I see
> *Pale blue* convolvulus in tendrils creep."

Yet a succession of epithets may not necessarily cancel each other out, but may reinforce each other and add essentials to the picture the line reveals. Thus when Milton writes of those who

> "for their bellies' sake
> Creep, and intrude and climb into the fold"

he has a specific and necessary purpose in the use of all three words.

> "Pray do not mock me. I am a very foolish fond old man."

None of those words could be taken away if the full tale of Lear's tragedy is to be told. Nor could a word be bated from the terrible words of the Ghost in *Hamlet*—

> "Cut off even in the blossoms of my sin,
> Unhousel'd, disappointed, unaneled."

Nor in the line

> "Where palsy shakes a few sad last grey hairs,"

is any one of the four epithets superfluous.

Sometimes, too, the poet must make an amalgam of his epithets, for by combining them into the compound epithet he may reinforce the meanings that each would separately have. This is a method frequently practised by Shakespeare.

> "How silver-sweet sound lovers' tongues by night
> Like softest music to attending ears."

Cleopatra is "marble-constant," Sleep is the "honey-heavy dew of slumber." Keats's work contains a large number of compound epithets, the effectiveness of which may be left to the student's judgment, e.g.

> "rain-scented eglantine,"
> "the tiger-moth's deep-damask'd wings,"
> "azure-lidded sleep."

The simplicity of a good epithet is a further mark of distinction. A simple word significantly used can give a more permanent impression than would be left by a more elaborate description.

"The round, lovely, thoughtful moon" is more real in fact as well as more suggestive to the imagination than Shelley's "orbèd maiden with white fire laden." Shakespeare takes a commonplace word, and, like an alchemist, turns it into gold, i.e. into great wealth economically contained in a small space.

> "Not poppy, nor mandragora,
> Nor all the drowsy syrups of the world
> Shall ever *medicine* thee to that sweet sleep. . . ."[1]

Between the simple and the obvious epithet the student may easily distinguish. The yellow moon, the pale stars, the purple mountains are generally no more than theatrical properties. The epithets are redundant. They pick out nothing significant. A poet is one who has this power of finding the magic word, the one word that reveals utterly the significance of the thing he is presenting. In the examples that will close this section the student may examine this power of selection; the power of crystallising pictures into solitary words.

> "Thou remember'st
> Since once I sat upon a promontory,
> And heard a mermaid on a dolphin's back,
> Uttering such dulcet and harmonious breath,
> That the rude sea grew civil at her song;
> And certain stars shot madly from their spheres,
> To hear the sea-maid's music."
> (*A Midsummer Night's Dream.*)

> "Sometime we see a cloud that's dragonish:
> A vapour sometime like a bear or lion,
> A tower'd citadel, a pendant rock,
> A forked mountain or blue promontory
> With trees upon't that nod unto the world,
> And mock our eyes with air."
> (*Antony and Cleopatra.*)

> "Music, when soft voices die,
> Vibrates in the memory;
> Odours, when sweet violets sicken,
> Live within the sense they quicken."
> (Shelley.)

[1] Observe that the effectiveness of the word is partly due to its inspired disobedience to grammar, to its conscription of a noun to do the duty of a verb?

"And still she slept an azure-lidded sleep
In blanched linen, smooth and lavender'd,
While he from forth the closet brought a heap
Of candied apple, quince, and plum, and gourd,
With jellies soother than the creamy curd,
And lucent syrups tinct with cinnamon:
Manna and dates, in argosy transferr'd
From Fez; and spiced dainties every one
From silken Samarcand to cedar'd Lebanon."

(Keats.)

"'Tis ever sweet through pines to see the sky
Blushing a deeper gold or darker blue.
'Tis ever sweet to lie
On the dry carpet of the needles brown,
And though the fanciful green lizard stir
And windy odours light as thistledown
Breathe from the lavdanon and lavender,
Half to forget the wandering and pain,
Half to remember days that have gone by,
And dream and dream that I am home again!"

(Flecker.)

"The trees with silvery rime bedight
Their branches bare.
By day no sun appeared; by night
The hidden moon shed thievish light
In the misty air."

(Bridges.)

"I have seen dawn and sunset on moors and windy hills
Coming in solemn beauty like slow old tunes of Spain;
I have seen the lady April bringing the daffodils,
Bringing the springing grass and the soft warm April rain."

(Masefield.)

"When the tea is brought at five o'clock,
And all the neat curtains are drawn with care,
The little black cat with bright green eyes
Is suddenly purring there.

At first she pretends, having nothing to do,
She has come in merely to blink by the grate;
But, though tea may be late or the milk may be sour,
She is never late.

And presently her agate eyes
Take a soft large milky haze,
And her independent, casual glance
Becomes a stiff, hard gaze."

(Harold Monro.)[1]

[1] In every case these poems are quoted only in part.

The Music of Words

Words are not only meaning and colour, but sound also. And in the selection of words the poet, above all other writers, is sensible of this. For our purpose it is unnecessary to determine whether Shakespeare's or Shelley's poetry is more naturally and instinctively melodious than Tennyson's. Whether their poetry becomes music by careful intention or by providential fortuity, the simplest analysis of their lines points in every case to the musical basis of great poetry. Some of these musical characteristics will be here illustrated. The first of these is *vowel-music.*

Herrick's *Dianeme* begins:

> "Sweet, be not proud of those two eyes
> Which star-like sparkle in their skies;"

The object of the poet in the first two lines, i.e. to convey the brilliance of Diamene, is in part borne by the variety of vowel sounds in the line (ten),—as well as by such devices as the pause after "Sweet." The recurrence of certain notes, such as "stár-like spárkle," emphasises that meaning. Such variety of vowel sounds invariably gives elasticity to a line, a full-throatedness that produces rich tones. Sheer variety of vowel sounds is not, however, invariably required. Music is not made by the striking of the largest possible number of different notes, but by the right succession and blending of notes together. The insistent recurrence of one sound may be demanded, or the repetition of a certain sound at regular intervals. "Take, O take those lips away" is not less rich in music because one vowel is thrice repeated; while the first two sounds of the line are immediately echoed in the second two.

Consonantal sounds are no less important in their effects on the reader. Tennyson's *Ulysses* contains some lines in which hard consonants are used with marvellous effect. Ulysses speaks of his mariners as

> "Souls that have toil'd and wrought and thought with me."

The "t's" and "d's" of that line give it a tautness that fully bears its meaning—the sound re-echoing the sense, as it does again in the same poet's "*T*ears, i*d*le *t*ears."

Alliteration is one of the most natural of literary effects; and possibly nine-tenths of the alliteration we find is less

a deliberate device than is commonly assumed. Particularly to a writer of a forcible temperament does alliteration come unconsciously—as naturally as gesture—simply as a means of enforcing his words. This may explain the frequency of its use by politicians and pressmen. At the same time it would be unreasonable to suggest that alliteration is not on occasion a very carefully arranged device, particularly when it is of the subtler sort, i.e. internal.

Its effects are manifold according to the consonants used. It may be of the forthright hammer stroke variety—

> "My good blade carves the casques of men,
> My tough lance thrusteth sure."

Or of the muted sort—Shakespeare's

> "O mistress mine where are you roaming?
> O stay and hear! Your true-love's coming. . . ."

and Gray's

> "moping owl does to the moon complain."

The letter "s" has several striking effects. Harshly sibilant as when it echoes the meaning in the lines

> "The man that hath no music in himself
> Is fit for treasons, stratagems and spoils."

Wistfully soothing as in

> "Sweet are the uses of adversity."

Or in

> "Lord Rameses of Egypt sighed
> Because a summer evening passed."

And richly plastic as in the catalogue of the Chief Grocer's wares in Flecker's *Hassan*:

> "Such sweet jams meticulously jarred
> As God's own prophet eats in Paradise."

This verse from Walter de la Mare's *Arabia* owes its narcotic power largely to alliteration:

> "Sweet is the music of Arabia
> In my heart, when out of dreams
> I still in the thin clear mirk of dawn
> Descry her gliding streams;
> Hear her strange lutes on the green banks
> Ring loud with the grief and delight
> Of the dim-silked, dark-haired Musicians
> In the brooding silence of night."

Rime: As one of the musical charms of poetry rime has enriched English literature from the days when initial alliteration began to weary our ancestors. It has been disputed whether rime is an adornment or a fetter to expression; but the problem has always solved itself for individual poets.

The purposes served by rime may be tabulated thus:

(1) As a purely musical device: an echo of sound that gives harmony to poetry.

(2) As a part of metrical structure, in so far as it emphasises the accent of the lines, and gives uniformity between verse and verse.

In these two ways rime gives a very definite structure to poetry, consolidating the form already given to it by metre.

There is no doubt that, at least until one has become very sensitive to the beauty of rhythm alone, rime gives pleasure to a reader or a listener. It makes poetry musical and memorable. The finest rime-effects moreover are not those of the more obvious or regular sort, but those that break like an unexpected chime. Internal rime and assonance are of this subtler sort. In Spenser, Shakespeare, the other Elizabethans, and in Milton, the beauties of rime may be found and examined by the student. Of modern poets the works of the present Laureate will yield the cunningest examples of rime. (See *London Snow* or *A Passer By*.)

A census of English poetry would probably show that there is as much blank verse as there is rimed. Strictly speaking, the term "blank" applies to any kind of rimeless verse: in English literature it is used to describe unrimed verse written in five-foot iambic lines. The reason for this is that very little rimeless verse has been composed in any other measure than iambic pentametre.

In Chapter VI some account will be found of the early use of blank verse, which in the 16th century was almost exclusively reserved for dramatic poetry. In play-writing rime may easily prove a distraction, for it hampers the dynamic movement of the play. In lyric writing, which is a kind of study in still life, static rather than dynamic, rime helps to emphasise the outline of the poem.

But lyric poetry, too, may dispense with rime, so long as it compensates by the use of some other musical device for the loss of harmony. Shakespeare's plays contain passages

which, having no bearing upon the action or the characterisation, are entirely undramatic in their purpose; and these are written in the same blank verse metre as the rest of the play. They could be taken out of the play without causing any loss of dramatic effectiveness (although their absence would injure the play æsthetically). They have a unity of their own which constitutes them lyrics. Sung or spoken elsewhere, outside the play, they would be perfect and complete in themselves. There come to mind such pieces as "The moon shines bright; in such a night as this . . .", and "Say that she rail, why then I'll tell her plain."

For further witness of the possibilities of non-dramatic blank verse there are Collins's *Evening* (blank, but not fully iambic); and Tennyson's *Tears, idle Tears* (where there are so many compensations for the loss of rime that few people realise it is a blank verse lyric).

Epic and narrative poetry, in so far as they have the "action" of drama, would seem to prosper on blank rather than rimed verse; and this is evidenced by the bulk of this kind of poetry in English: Milton's, Tennyson's, Browning's. Yet even here it is unsafe to dogmatise; for Goldsmith and William Morris have shown that a narrative may successfully be set out in rime.

There is one musical device, related both to alliteration and to rime, which may escape the reader because of its delicacy. It is *Assonance:* a similarity of vowel sounds (lacking that further agreement of consonantal sounds which would make rime), for example "may" and "rain." It is a harmony less easy to detect than rime; and for that reason it can give poetry a charm which is greater because it is hidden. Once again, it is in the work of Robert Bridges that we find the organised melody of assonance—as well as of internal rime:

> "Wanton with long delay the gay Spring leaping cometh;
> The blackthorn starreth now his bough on the eve of May:
> All day in the sweet box-tree the bee for pleasure hummeth:
> The cuckoo sends afloat his note on the air all day."
>
> (From *Spring*, 1885.)

Repetition: If poetry were music only, the repetition of certain sounds would be essential to it. A poet may be so enthralled by the sound of a word as to repeat it, either immediately or later, for a purely æsthetic purpose. But

Poetry is more than music, and therefore repetition may occur in poetry as a means of emphasising what is being said, and as a method of intensifying the mood or atmosphere of the poem.

William Morris very frequently used repetition with the musical intention: in the *Eve of Crecy* he uses the same line to close each stanza, as though the sound of it was an ecstasy of which he could not tire:

> "Gold on her head and gold on her feet,
> And gold where the hems of her kirtle meet,
> And a golden girdle round my sweet;
> Ah! qu'elle est belle la Marguerite."

Moreover in this verse the recurring sound of "gold" gives a sustained *tone value* that reinforces the *image* it gives of dazzling raiment.

Under certain circumstances it is more natural than not to repeat oneself. So in many dirges and laments the despair of the poet is echoed in one word or phrase. David's lament for Absalom remains the finest example; Shelley's *Adonais* and Shakespeare's *Come away, Come away, Death,* contain other notable uses of repetition. But repetition may convey intensity of other feelings than the mourner's. In the *Cradle Song* (quoted on page 24) the lines

> "Tread softly, softly,
> O! men coming in"

echo, by repetition alone, the imperative signs and whisperings of the cradle watchers to the home-coming labourers. The mood of bleakness of Amiens' song in *As You Like It* is fully borne by

> "Blow, blow, thou bitter wind,
> . . . Freeze, freeze, thou bitter sky."

Robert Bridges's *Awake, my Heart, to be loved,* conveys the blithe madness of Spring, partly by this same device, and partly by the urgent rhythm:

> "Awake, my heart, to be loved, awake, awake!
> The darkness silvers away, the morn doth break,
> It leaps in the sky: unrisen lustres slake
> The o'ertaken moon. Awake, O heart, awake!"

Throughout the poem the ecstasy of the poet re-surges in each

final line, in a slightly varied pattern of the first line of the poem.

Echo-Writing, or Onomatopœia, like alliteration, is sometimes regarded as artifice pure and simple, and examples of it are held up that are perhaps mechanically perfect but poetically unsatisfying. In good poetry, mood and sense must be echoed in sound; but manifestly the most obvious echo is not necessarily the best poetry. The following passage illustrates the kind of echo-writing that fails to move one because it is too strained—

> "Only fishes flashing brightly
> In the rushes matted tightly
> Or the firefly dancing lightly
> Stir the haziness."[1]

The genuine echo of sense in sound will be found universally in good poetry, as the following selections show. In some cases there may be much artifice shown; but in all there is a certain appropriateness that is beyond artifice to attain. The effects in part may be due to the use of particular vowels or consonants, to the choice of words or of rhythm, to the use of pause or repetition. But this should not be *immediately* apparent; nor perhaps is it advisable to subject one's favourite poems to such an analysis as will explain their composition completely.

The more apparent echoes, like Tennyson's

> "Break, break, break
> On thy cold grey stones, O sea!",

where the pause-intervals inevitably suggest the backwash of the waves, may be readily enough discovered. The extracts that follow, if less obvious, will yield a greater final pleasure in the subtlety of their effects. An attempt has been made to arrange these extracts in an ascending scale, so that the first ones are examples of a more obvious kind, and the later ones of a more delicate kind.

I. Nashe's:

> "Spring, the sweet Spring, is the year's pleasant King;
> Then blooms each thing, then maids dance in a ring;
> Cold doth not sting, the pretty birds do sing:
> Cuckoo, jug jug, pu we, to witta woo."

The merry rhythm of this piece and the repeated chime of

[1] *Public School Verse* (1923 Volume).

the "ing" syllable together will account for the perfect impression it gives of its subject-matter. Other examples of a similar sort are Tennyson's *Charge of the Light Brigade* and *Sweet and Low;* and Masefield's *Sea Fever.*

II. Milton's famous sonnet *On the Late Massacre in Piedmont* is a less definite piece of echo-writing. It has the sound of righteous indignation in it, the vibrations of passion. The well-contrived pauses, the familiar Puritan epithets of denunciation, the very sonnet-form itself all contribute to this effect. But beyond these discernible artifices there is something else. The mood of passionate invocation in which the poem seems to have been written has come through whole into the very sound of the poem; it has been fused into it to a degree that art alone could not manage. In Robt. Bridges's *Spring Goeth all in White* and *London Snow* this same reflection of mood in the sound of the poem has been attained, although it is hard to find any actual artifices in the poem that might give the effect.

III. The delicacy of Padraic Colum's *Cradle Song* is not to be accounted for only by pointing out that repetition is largely used in it and that even the exclamation marks seem to play a part in hushing us! Here has been accomplished that transference of mood into sound that is beyond the power of artifice to achieve. As one reads the poem, the voice instinctively falls to a whisper:

"O men from the fields!
Come gently within.
Tread softly, softly,
O! men coming in.

Mavourneen is going
From me and from you,
Where Mary will fold him
With mantle of blue!

From reek of the smoke
And cold of the floor
And the peering of things
Across the half-door.

O, men from the fields!
Soft, softly come through.
Mary puts round him
Her mantle of blue."

Walter de la Mare's *Nod*, elsewhere quoted, is of the same delicacy. The twilight drowsy mood of the poem echoes itself in twilight drowsy sounds.

IV. Then there is Flecker's *Old Ships*—with that wonderful passage in its second part where the sounds marvellously echo the sudden choking surmise of the thought. (In the first part of the poem, he speaks of the old ships, so old as to seem relics of days of piracy and slaving.) Then the poem continues—

> " But I have seen,
> Pointing her shapely shadows from the dawn
> And image tumbled on a rose-swept bay,
> A drowsy ship of some yet older day;
> And, wonder's breath indrawn,
> Thought I—who knows—who knows—but in that same
> (Fished up beyond Aeaea, patched up new
> —Stern painted brighter blue—)
> That talkative baldheaded seaman came
> (Twelve patient comrades sweating at the oar)
> From Troy's doom-crimson shore,
> And with great lies about his wooden horse
> Set the crew laughing and forgot his course."

V. Stevenson's *Requiem* is a resolute poem written in no mood of resignation, but with the conviction that a race has been well run. This mood is echoed partly in the strong accent that falls on the first syllable of each line, and possibly in the alliteration of " h " in the second verse. But here again there is something more elusive; here again the mood is interpreted in some way that will not yield to analysis.

Imagery

Figures of speech are used by everyone who wishes to express himself adequately; for graphic presentation is the most attractive and most intelligible to mankind. Unable to make a listener fully appreciate what we are speaking of, we try to explain it through some image that is familiar to him. The picturesque can make plain what plain language leaves obscure; and what is more important, it leaves a deeper impression on the memory. It is the use of figurative language that makes the speech of the Cockney and of the Oriental vigorous and vivid.

The use of figures of speech has a twofold value. For a simile or metaphor has not only the immediate and utilitarian purpose of making comprehension easier, but the equally

important purpose of giving æsthetic pleasure. To be told that a fieldsman threw down a wicket "like forked lightning" is not only to realise the brilliance of the return, but to be stimulated by an image that has an interest in itself.

Poetry, whose concern is to make pictures no less than to embody thought, needs imagery as fundamentally as it needs sound and rhythm. And its need for imagery is a more urgent one than that of prose, in the exact proportion by which poetry is a more compact and economical and transcendent form of expression than prose. Poetry must use pictures to save words.

Simile is the simplest and the oldest of the Three Graces of imagery, as old as the day when some primitive ancestor despairing of conveying his contempt for a neighbour's clumsy appearance said that the fellow was like a brontosaurus. He left no doubt as to his meaning, and he left also a picture that no doubt lingered and disturbed. Simile begins in its simplest form as a comparison between one object and another. It is a kind of Impressionism. The declared likeness between the two objects is not to be understood as persisting in every detail; it is a similarity only between the significant features. It has a parallel in the caricature of an artist whose subject, possessing an unusually long nose or loose ears, is drawn with a trunk or ass's ears. So the simile "the Assyrian came down like a wolf on the fold" picks out the momentary characteristic of the Assyrian and presents it as an impression that is, temporarily at least, true. The good simile will always pick out this one significant resemblance. So Shakespeare writes of Richard II's Queen, now to be sent back to France

> "from whence, set forth in pomp
> She came adorned hither like sweet May."

That is the perfect simile. Faithfully making plain the poignant meaning, and at the same moment suggesting exactly that memory of lost happiness that the occasion demands. Viola's description of the pining lover "like Patience on a monument" has the same perfect blend of truth and suggestiveness.

Elaboration is not required in a simile, and is often a handicap. Milton's similes sometimes run this risk, and become decorative rather than vital, e.g. of Satan—

" Then soars
Up to the fiery concave towering high.
As when far off at sea a fleet descried
Hangs in the clouds, by equinoctial winds
Close sailing from Bengala, or the isles
Of Ternate and Tidore, whence merchants bring
Their spicy drugs; they, on the trading flood,
Thro' the wide Ethiopan to the Cape,
Ply stemming nightly toward the pole; so seem'd
Far off the flying fiend."

At the same time it is pedantic to insist that a simile should not " wander " in this way. The complaint that our attention is distracted from the immediate matter is a confession of pedestrianism. The sustained picture Milton gives may be irrelevant to the subject; but when we come back to " so seem'd far off the flying fiend " surely our minds are reinvigorated by the rich variety of the simile, and the story is renewed with perfect ease.

The marvellous succession of similes in Shelley's *Skylark* are of this same nature. The " practical " mind may be worried because the skylark's song is compared to a series of such different things; confused by the kaleidoscope of quickly changing pictures. Yet even on utilitarian grounds this series is justified. It presents a group of rich parallels to the bird's perfect song; it compels us to consider the universality of Beauty in many forms.

It is legitimate for the simile to evoke unexpected images, to shock us, even, into comprehension; always retaining, however, the basic link between the subjects of comparison. So, Keats's picture of massed clouds

" journeying in the west like herded elephants "

impresses us largely because of its unexpectedness. Shelley's

" Life like a dome of many-coloured glass
Stains the white radiance of eternity "

breaks with amazing power into the poem—so forcibly as to arrest a reader and send him wandering into other thoughts so deeply that as often as not he forgets to finish the poem. The account in Cabell's *Jurgen* of the souls eager to get through the Gate of Heaven contains a simile which may seem incongruous in that particular connection but which is forcible and suggestive—

" like ants that swarm to molasses."

Even in this final example the rather horrible shock of the lines may give us a notion of evening that has truth in it:

> "When the evening is spread out against the sky
> Like a patient etherized upon a table."

But it fails to be a good simile, not because of its startlingness, but because, to general experience, it does not agree with one's observation nor quicken one's imagination. Nevertheless the homely and familiar comparison can be equally effective. Shakespeare's delicate touch can transform what promises to be simply an amusing simile into one of the most pathetic in literature. It is the line on the dying Falstaff in *Henry V.*

> "His nose was as sharp as a pen—and a' babbled of green fields."

And repeatedly he builds up a simile from the commonest of everyday things, making it marvellously appropriate:

> "Ah yet doth Beauty, like a dial hand,
> Steal from his figure, and no pace perceiv'd."

That unexpected saving grace that can so marvellously lighten misfortune (the "silver lining" of the music-hall songs) has no better description than he gives it: Adversity

> "Which, like a toad, ugly and venomous,
> Yet wears a precious jewel in his head. . . ."

Finally, it is not enough for a simile to be simply a faithful comparison; it must have *vision* as well as *truth.* Many of Tennyson's similes have an over-elaboration that sacrifices the first of these qualities to the second; although the two are often satisfied in such a description as that of Enid singing:

> "as the sweet voice of a bird,
> Heard by the lander in a lonely isle,
> Moves him to think what kind of bird it is
> That sings so delicately clear, and make
> Conjecture of the plumage and the form;
> So the sweet voice of Enid moved Geraint."

Metaphor, like simile, builds up a picture on the strength of resemblance between two things; but in every way it is a more concentrated figure than simile. (Thus it is used in that peptonised form of wisdom, the Proverb: the Rolling

Stone, the Ill Wind, the Shorn Lamb.) The objects under comparison are no longer set side by side; it is left to the metaphorical word to flash *one* of them into the mind. Blake's Tiger is not directly compared with the Flame it suggests to the poet. But "Tiger, tiger, *burning* bright," provides the magic word that flashes into the mind the comparison of the tiger with the flame. The forcibility of metaphor lies in its statement of the truth that is contained in its exaggeration. The bright person in *The Young Visitors* who speaks of the people *oozing* out into the street had noted the significant feature of their going out. It is impossible to substitute any other word for hers. Metaphor may be caricature, but yet bear such a surprising *general* likeness as to be actually nearer the truth than a photograph. The custom of the American Indians, who called each other Hawk Eye or Laughing Water or Running Stag, sufficiently illustrates this power of metaphor to reveal truth through exaggeration. The names of animals, etc., are used by the Indian as names of men and women. Strictly speaking they are untrue names; but in so far as the use of them fixes the personality or main characteristics of those men and women, they surpass the bare truth.

A metaphor, like a simile, gains in effectiveness by its novelty and unexpectedness. Moreover, since it is already more concentrated, i.e. is generally a word instead of a phrase, that effectiveness is yet again increased over that of a simile. So when Bolingbroke calls Richard's advisers the "caterpillars of the Commonwealth" he has characterised them perfectly. It is a comparison between things utterly remote except in the one respect that is at the moment exclusively important. This is the type of perfect metaphor, the one that hits upon the significant similarity among a host of differences; and the more varied and obvious these differences are the more does the one feature stand out that is common to the things under comparison. W. H. Davies's description of the robin—"that little hunchback in the snow"—is the same kind of unexpected yet perfect characterisation. Shakespeare has one phrase which curiously illustrates the manner in which metaphors are made, i.e. by the poet's seeking for some other name that will spontaneously reveal a fundamental quality. "Frailty, thy name is woman!" The degrees by which this search for the significant name is carried through are illustrated in those series of Shakespearean metaphors in which

Prince Hal and Falstaff seek to find the most perfectly spectacular designation for each other.

A "far-fetched" metaphor is not to be condemned for its novelty. So long as it has the necessary contact with truth, it gains by provoking an unusual imaginative stimulus. However bizarre the following metaphor may be it does not lack stimulus. A lover says

> "My Vigour is a new-minted penny,
> Which I cast at your feet.
> Gather it up from the dust
> That it may sparkle and amuse you."

Pedantry has unduly condemned "mixed metaphor," i.e. the use of conflicting images in one connection. Mixed metaphor is the product of poetic exuberance. So eager is the poet to make plain his meaning that he seizes on one image after another, not pausing to see that they possess that uniformity so dear to grammarians. But a run of mixed metaphors may be as stimulating as Shelley's "mixed" similes in *The Skylark:* a kaleidoscope that ranges through the whole spectrum.

Images, related or not, crowd simultaneously into the poet's mind, reinforcing his *general meaning* even when they disagree with *each other.* With the image in his mind of Hamlet arming himself against misfortune, Shakespeare was filled with a second one—of "the sea of trouble." Writing as he probably did, on a flowing tide of composition, the two images were welded into lines that, by their very contradiction, are overwhelming. One might suggest also that in this case the mixed metaphor is dramatically appropriate to Hamlet's welter of indecision:

> "Whether 'tis nobler in the mind to suffer
> The slings and arrows of outrageous fortune,
> Or to take arms against a sea of troubles,
> And by opposing end them?"[1]

A metaphor is unpleasing or not, as a simile is, according to the associations it brings to the individual reader. One who in youth was for days full of the gorgeously horrid picture of the Cyclops of *The Odyssey* can never be satisfied with Wordsworth's picture of the daisy:

[1] The ancient emendation of 'siege' for 'sea' itself testifies to the pedant's horror of mixed metaphor.

"A little Cyclops with one eye
Staring to threaten and defy."

Nor does the same poet's description of Oxford please a modern:

"Ye sacred nurseries of blooming youth!"

—not only because of the associations of the last adjective but because of a decided inappropriateness in the first noun. Whatever fails to give the illuminating significance of impressionism and the equally necessary æsthetic satisfaction is, for the individual reader, an inadequate metaphor. Poetry at its best is metaphor. To give examples would be to copy out lines from the great poets. The few that follow are such random lines, metaphors that happen to please the present writer.

No one in literature has had more similes and metaphors flung at him than Falstaff, and of these the following illustrates the metaphor made by the transference of meaning of a verb—perhaps the most subtle and suggestive of all the kinds of metaphor:

"Falstaff sweats to death,
And *lards* the lean earth as he walks along."

Coleridge found a similarly graphic metaphor to convey the horror of the becalmed tropical sea—"The very deep did *rot*." And Milton, in *Paradise Lost*, wrote of "Groves whose rich trees *wept* odorous gums and balms." Keats's invocation to Sleep—

"Turn the key deftly in the oilèd wards
And seal the hushèd casket of my soul"

—is a metaphor built on a very frail possibility of resemblance. The comparison with a mechanical device such as a lock is "far-fetched." Yet the metaphor manages to suggest that subtle physiological action which, at the moment of falling asleep, shuts off the mind from reality. Shakespeare uses a very forcible comparison when Cleopatra says of her youthful folly

"my salad days
When I was green in judgement."

His skill in the use of metaphor founded on the homely, familiar comparison is shown again in the 146th Sonnet. The

poet asks his soul why he sets so much store on the passing pleasures of the body—

> " Why so large cost, having so short a lease,
> Dost thou upon thy fading mansion spend ? "

Landor, again, used the commonplace in that perfect and moving metaphor—

> " I strove with none for none was worth my strife ;
> Nature I loved and, next to Nature, Art ;
> I warmed both hands before the fire of life,
> It sinks, and I am ready to depart."

Personification : Primitive literature shows that the use of this figure was one of the earliest devices of poetic expression. When stars and winds and thunder were not yet capable of scientific explanation they remained the subject of superstition. Natural phenomena were commonly regarded as being of good or evil intent, that is, they were credited with personalities. Rain was a beneficent Being, Thunder a malignant One.

Happily for poetry, a knowledge of astronomy has not depersonified Sun, Moon, and Stars. It is still æsthetically satisfying to regard them as Gods and Goddesses. Moreover certain abstractions are made more immediate and comprehensible when they are translated into terms of human personality. Sleep, Death, Wisdom, Love, Vengeance are some of the abstractions that poetry has made more real and graphic by the method of personification. In these abstractions, as well as in Nature, and in inanimate objects, there are *in fact* hints of personality, of anger, of laughter, of sorrow ; and these hints suggest a fuller development. By them a man is reminded of attributes he finds in men ; so he personifies them, pictures them as human. Thus the description of a ship as " she " is a personification that began when sailing ships first struck into an observer's mind the hints of flowing grace and " contrariness " that are associated with women. When Keats saw some oak trees he found in them suggestions of power and wisdom that caused him to write of them as " green-robed senators of mighty woods." This figure shares with simile and metaphor the twofold service of explaining as well as beautifying an idea or an observation. Some of the most stimulating things in poetry are personifications of the moon—Shelley's "Art thou pale for

weariness" is one of the best-known. Another is Walter de la Mare's delightful *Silver*—

> "Slowly, silently, now the moon
> Walks the night in her silver shoon;
> This way and that she peers and sees
> Silver fruit upon silver trees."

John Freeman's *It was the lovely Moon* (fully quoted in Chap. I) is another that wonderfully transfigures moonlight into a luminous personality. Robt. Graves's *Star Talk* is one of the happiest personifications. The Gemelli, the Pleiads, Orion, the Great She Bear, and Aquarius, through their appearance or their associations, are delightfully humanised—

> "'Are you cold too, poor Pleiads,
> This frosty night?'
> 'Yes, and so are the Hyads;
> See us cuddle and hug,' say the Pleiads,
> 'All six in a ring: it keeps us warm:
> We huddle together like birds in a storm:
> It's bitter weather to-night,
> It's bitter weather to-night.'"

Death is a familiar figure to the poets in a multitude of disguises. He is Shakespeare's "fell sergeant," "strict in his arrest"—the policeman—again the commonplace charged with meaning. He is Longfellow's Reaper—

> "There is a Reaper whose name is Death,
> And with his sickle keen
> He reaps the bearded grain at a breath,
> And the flowers that grow between."

To a modern soldier poet (Alan Seager) he is an expected friend—

> "I have a rendezvous with Death
> At some disputed barricade."

Sleep is, for Shakespeare, "Nature's soft nurse" (*Henry V*); for John Gay a charmer "with thy rod of incantation." For Walter de la Mare it is the mysterious Knight wandering in a lonely place—

> "I met at eve the Prince of Sleep,
> His was a still and lovely face,
> He wandered through a valley steep,
> Lovely in a lonely place.

His garb was grey of lavender,
About his brows a poppy-wreath
Burned like dim coals, and everywhere
The air was sweeter for his breath."

Every personification in poetry is an expression of the poet's relation to the things he humanises; an interpretation of the significance of the things in terms of human action and feeling. By no means is this always a conscious interpretation. In that state of imaginative excitement from which poetry springs the poet is creating his own world, and is peopling it with figures that in lesser worlds like this Earth were but inanimate clay or bloodless legends or scientific phenomena. What are simply examples of personification to us, to Shelley were realities.

Personification is effective only when it creates a vivid picture. If it becomes merely a conventional decoration its æsthetic value is as little as that of most of the statuary in Westminster Abbey: a mass of figures with no significance. During the 18th century, in particular, personification deteriorated into a customary suit for poetic expression, and poets as capable as Gray filled their lines with clumsy, lumpish phrases like "rosy-bosomed Hours," "Contemplation's sober eye," "blue-eyed Pleasures," "sullen Care," and "pale Melancholy."

Hyperbole, in common with the three former figures, gains its effects by exaggeration. Simile and metaphor are less true than suggestive. So hyperbole, whose purpose is to impress, fulfils its intention by phrases that sweep away from the point of truth (where they really do originate) in a great spectacular arc. It is a sensational over-statement, justified by its sheer brilliance. In this way does Shakespeare use hyperbole in the mouths of his more vehement characters, e.g. Hotspur's

"By Heaven methinks it were an easy leap
To pluck bright honour from the pale-fac'd moon. . . ."

And

"Why, look you, I am whipp'd and scourg'd with rods,
Nettled and stung with pismires. . . ."

Shakespeare, too, was evidently well aware of the danger of hyperbole: of its ready degeneration into bombast if the true fire is lacking. Thus he makes Hamlet answer

ironically to Laertes' hyperbolic expression of woe (which is phrased in the excessive fashion of the Elizabethan courtier)—

> " Woo't weep ? Woo't fight ? Woo't fast ? Woo't tear thyself ?
> Woo't drink up eisel ? eat a crocodile ?
> I'll do't. Dost thou come here to whine ?
> To outface me with leaping in her grave ? . . .
> . . . *Nay, an thou'lt mouth,*
> *I'll rant as well as thou.*"

Hyperboles, like sky-rockets, may make a very picturesque display ; but just as often they may splutter and fizzle out. Of modern writers with a fondness for this figure Stephen Phillips is the most noteworthy, and many of his spectacular efforts fall flat. At his best his hyperbole has the violent power of Marlowe's, as in those flamboyant images which spring to the diseased brain of Herod—

> " The red-gold cataract of her streaming hair
> Is tumbled o'er the boundaries of the world."

The remaining figures of speech are seldom employed in poetry : even in prose they are less often consciously employed than unconsciously. Some of them are so commonly and naturally used in daily conversation that we often employ them without knowing they possess some hall-mark of Greek derivation. Thus the figure known as *Climax*, the ascent to a crushing conclusion, is practised by every forcible speaker. It is a steady reinforcement of the argument, preparing the way to the final statement that stands firmer and higher because of the graduated preamble. *Anti-climax* or *bathos* is a figure for comic use, a sudden precipitation *down* the ladder, very brightly used by Pope. *Synecdoche* uses " a part for the whole," or vice versa, and so pretends to remove poetry from fustian speech by speaking of " a thousand sabres . . ." instead of a thousand cavalrymen. *Metonymy* is a blood-relation of metaphor. It calls a thing by the name of its accompaniment or its associations. Used poetically it transforms " age " into " grey hairs." But contemporary use of this figure has lost much of its power to touch the imagination, although it may retain a certain amount of colour, as when a journalist speaks of the Bench or the Crown when he means the Judge or the King.

Rhythm

In Nature as well as in Poetry rhythm is the principle of life. The stars recur in their courses, the tides renew their flow at regular intervals, the Seasons follow each other in a fixed order. The human heart beats with consistent regularity; the joints and muscles work in a regular, co-ordinated movement. This phenomenon is illustrated, again, in man's reaction to those rhythmic movements that give him pleasure in such exercises as dancing. When he is moved by some intense emotion he inclines to speak in a definite rhythm, e.g. the "hwyl" or ecstasy of the Welsh revivalist expressed in an ebb and flow of prayer. This physiological condition of man's nature appears to account for the pleasure he takes in those arts which are based on the principle of rhythm, namely Music and Poetry. The more frankly animal a man is, and the less trained to the subtleties of rhythm, the more frankly does he enjoy the simplest and most elementary rhythms. In that state his untutored ear delights in the cacophonies of brass bands and limericks.

Prose and poetry are each rhythmical expression; but, while that of prose is irregular, the rhythm of poetry is distinctly marked; and this gives it a charm and durability that were appreciated as far back as when the primitive world began to entertain itself with stories in verse long before it took to prose.

Regularity is the feature of verse rhythm: in English verse, the recurrence of a stressed syllable at definite periods within a line. This regular pattern, made by similar groups of syllables, is *metre*. The number of patterns or metres available in English poetry is few, and they are each described according to the number of stresses or beats they contain and the size of the interval between those beats.

— — — —
"When you | destroy | a blade | of grass
You poi|son Eng|land at|her roots."

Here the pattern is: four beats with intervals of one unstressed syllable, the first bar or foot being a variation (— ∪).

Algebraically expressed: [4] ∪ —

And technically labelled Iambus.

The chief metres of English poetry are :

∪ —	Iambus
— ∪	Trochee
∪ ∪ —	Anapæst
— ∪ ∪	Dactyl
∪ — ∪	Amphibrach
— —	Spondee.

The study of metres has been littered with the debris of classical prosody, and the clumsy titles given to English metres are an inheritance from those who sought to measure all poetry by the foot-rule of one civilisation. Enjoyment of poetry is hampered by the maxims of prosodists who strain at a line and swallow its beauty by warping iambics into trochaics for the sake of uniformity in scansion. Any poem in the language can be rhythmically felt or spoken by the very simple analysis into beats or stresses. For the practical purpose of reading English poetry one has simply to recognise the number of stresses in a line of poetry, and to observe the pattern of bars or feet made by these stresses. The metre of the poem will be revealed only by intelligent, sympathetic reading. If *The Cloud* has first to be "scanned," to be butchered and carved into anapæst and iamb and spondee, nothing has been discovered except a prosodic "irregularity." If it is read aloud its metre strikes the ear immediately, as unerringly as the rhythm of music itself. The one thing to listen for is that fundamental regular ebb and flow of sound which is the pulse of poetry. The pleasure given by metre to most readers of poetry is very largely an unconscious one ; for the reader is rare who finds it necessary to analyse or "scan" poetry. The rhythm of a poem is sufficiently evident in its opening lines ; and one *feels* for that rhythm first of all. The general pattern echoes in one's mind as the reading continues ; and any variation from it is at once felt by the reader of average sensitiveness. If the variation is part of the poet's intention, the reader will find such an intention impressed on him by the change of time or stress in the rhythm. Cycling provides sensations similar to these. Once mounted, one moves along unconsciously in a certain rhythm. Any variation of that motion recalls one to a consciousness of the forgotten rhythm. And so in poetry, once the reading has begun, the basic metre is taken for granted ; and one realises its

existence again only when one of those variations occurs by which the poet is trying to adapt his rhythm to his meaning.

Poetry, like drama, is meant to be spoken ; its music cannot be appreciated unless it is read aloud. Scansion at its best is no more than a kind of musical notation—and evidently one cannot appreciate poetry by a method of metrical markings. Scott's *Coronach* is lost to the scansionist ; it is sheer beauty when spoken sensitively, with the stresses falling inevitably where the mood and sense of the poem command. Masefield's *Cargoes* has the same inevitability in its rhythm. One need not know a dactyl from a spondee to read it beautifully. Shelley's *The Cloud* and the *Euganean Hills* reveal their music completely to the reader who will fall into the rhythm that is there on the face of the poem. If this feeling for rhythm is lacking the reader is without the prime necessity for the enjoyment of poetry.

Verse-Rhythm and Sense-Rhythm : This distinction is to be noticed not because it is a confusion, but because the two rhythms are complementary. A poem is born in the poet's mind much more easily than it is nurtured through adolescence to maturity. The thought or picture he has been brooding over resolves itself into an opening line or stanza that must *set a pattern* for the rest of the poem. It gives the initial standard to which, for the sake of balance and harmony, the rest of the poem must conform. But, unless the poet wishes to sacrifice his meaning, he must not unduly cramp it into a set mould. Within the verse-rhythm or general pattern of the poem there will occur lines or phrases that must be given latitude to express themselves in a natural rhythm. So within the blank verse ($5 \cup —$) pattern of his dramatic poetry, Shakespeare frequently permits such natural variations as

— — ∪ — ∪ ∪ — — ∪ —
" Friends, Ro | mans coun | try men | lend me | your ears."

The five-beat pattern is held to, but the beats are shifted to the incidence of the sense. By weaving the two rhythms together poetry gains in plasticity and in power. The architectural verse-rhythm remains as the foundation, it is the *prominent* rhythm ; but into it the poet works the variations demanded by sense. If a phrase comes to the poet's mind with a strong will of its own (i.e. a rhythm natural to it) he

gives it freedom to say itself. A poem of the most perfectly regular metre will often need the variations that sense-rhythm can give it, if its richness is to be wholly felt. Anyone who spoke W. H. Davies's

> "A poor life this if, full of care,
> We have no time to stand and stare"

in strict iambics would be barren of a feeling for rhythm. Often enough the two rhythms coincide, but such perfect concord too far prolonged—as it is in Gray's *Elegy*—is as uninteresting as any other model of uniformity.

A change from metre to metre within a poem enriches it both musically and intellectually. Echo-writing can be achieved by rhythm alone as well as by words. If the thought that is moulding the lines breaks out into some extraordinary mood, the poet may do more than shift the stresses of the line. He may add or omit syllables so that the thought may be set down red-hot and whole. To break it with too much deliberation into the strict four- or five-bar line would be to destroy that harmony of thought and rhythm that we have postulated as one of the essentials of poetry. Shakespeare is again the shining example of this practice. Macbeth's agony of terror is conveyed in lines that mainly depart from the blank-verse pattern ($5 \cup —$); but the regular blank-verse line recurs often enough to make clear the general pattern; it throws into relief these other lines where the urgency of the subject-matter is allowed to reveal itself in irregularities:

> "Is this a dagger which I see before me
> The handle toward my hand? Come let me clutch thee:
> I have thee not, and yet I see thee still.
> Art thou not, fatal vision, sensible
> To feeling as to sight? or art thou but
> A dagger of the mind, a false creation
> Proceeding from the heat-oppressèd brain?
> I see thee yet in form as palpable
> As this which now I draw. . . ."

Shelley's *Swiftly walk o'er the western wave* is a poem marvellously sensitive in rhythm to the quick changes of mood and meaning in the poem; *The Cloud* and the *Ode to the West Wind* have the same perfect understanding between metre and matter. Shelley's poetry has caused pitched battles among the prosodists, but the average ear thrills to its harmony of meaning and music. And one doubts whether Shelley

was as much a technician as some ingenious professors have found him. His effects strike one not as the elaborations of a metrist but as the natural consequence of the true poetic method: the discovery of those rhythms that the poet's exaltation of mood *demand*.

Much of the best in modern poetry is that which is most elastic in rhythm. Thomas Hardy's is an example—

> "Only a man harrowing clods
> In a slow silent walk
> With an old horse that stumbles and nods
> Half asleep as they stalk."

Its "irregularity" would worry a scansionist. It is a perfect harmony of rhythm and sense. The poems of Walter de la Mare are pre-eminently of the same kind, where mood and thought find not only words for themselves but rhythm also.[1] As Emerson said: "It is not metres but a metre-making argument that makes a poem—a thought so alive and passionate that, like the spirit of an animal or a plant, it has an architecture of its own, and adorns Nature with a new thing."

It would be absurd to suppose that these effects are mysteriously achieved by the poet. To some extent thoughts may actually phrase themselves; but, beyond that, the poet uses a very real technique of rhythm. The best poet is not satisfied with the regularities of metre. He is so keenly attuned to poetry that he can by experiment and rejection find that one ultimate rhythm which is so perfect an expression of his thought as to conceal the artifice that made it. The most obvious way of avoiding that rigidity which is the fault of, say, Gray's poetry, is by an occasional departure from the regular metre, i.e. adding or subtracting syllables. Wordsworth used the device of Pause to make the rhythm of *To Sleep* an echo of its matter:

> "A flock of sheep that leisurely pass by
> One after one;
>
> I've thought of all by turns and yet do lie
> Sleepless."

There is a novel use of Pause (with astonishing effect) in another poem, which triumphantly transgresses many laws of prosody—Ralph Hodgson's *Eve*, of which the first two verses are here quoted:

[1] See Chapter V.

"Eve, with her basket, was
Deep in the bells and grass,
Wading in bells and grass
Up to her knees,
Plucking a dish of sweet
Berries and plums to eat
Down in the bells and grass
Under the trees.

Mute as a mouse in a
Corner the cobra lay,
Curled round a bough of the
Cinnamon tall. . . .
Now to get even and
Humble proud heaven and
Now was the moment or
Never at all."

Skill in handling Pause (i.e. in placing the "Cæsura" or "cut") is one of the marks of a great poet. The metrical plan insistently followed, as it was in the early blank verse, or in the tight-laced verse of Pope and his followers, cramps the meaning within lines of a fixed length. The shifting of the pause, without impairing the pattern of the verse, relieves the meaning of any burden that would unduly crush it. Shakespeare and Milton particularly used Pause with such certainty that the meaning is not choked even under the steadiest, unvarying pressure of metre.

In a later chapter examples of early blank verse will be compared with the maturer blank verse of Shakespeare. The comparison illustrates the use of Pause as well as the use of other methods—such as the addition or omission of a syllable or a bar—that make a line of poetry as flexible as the very thought it expresses. This unity of idea and rhythm is the subtlest achievement of poetry; so perfect a harmony as to be beyond analysis. In the finest poetry, it *exists*. How it is won, neither reader nor author can completely understand. This fortuity of expression is noted by Flaubert: "Why does it happen that when one compresses a thought most completely one writes a verse? Why is it that there is this essential connection between the exact phrase and the musical one?"

CHAPTER III

THE BALLAD

I

THE greater part of the earliest English literature that we possess is poetry; but what may at first seem an odd historical fact can be very reasonably accounted for. In a period when writing was either not known or not widely practised, memory was the only means of preserving any literature that the age produced. Experiment will at once show that for most of us memory can retain poetry more easily than prose. Words arranged in metrical order are under a discipline, a more or less regular formation that enables the memory to marshal them more quickly than it can in the more straggling order of prose.

There is one very significant feature of early poetry that must be noticed at once: it was invariably associated with two other arts, Dancing and Music. In both these respects the poetry that lived before history began its certain tale was different from the poetry of civilisation, which does not admit of communal creation any more than it necessarily recognises a kinship with music or with dancing.

All three of these arts depend for their expression on the sense of rhythm that is an endowment of even the rudest type of man, and all three were employed at primitive public assemblies to express whatever emotion was on the occasion strongest in the tribe. What later grew to be poetry may at first have been simply an accompaniment to the two more important arts—a recurring cry or chant or chorus fitting with the rhythm of the dance. It is easy to reconstruct the process of development from this humble beginning—the addition of some brief story that was already in tribal literature—in such form as would not break across the rhythm of the performance; the calling out of a question; the chorused answer; the topical allusion. These were among

the features that lifted the least of the arts into a more prominent position at community gatherings.

The composers of this earliest work are not known to us; and in their own day their status was not as distinguished a one as that of the man of letters of civilisation. The earliest compositions were the work of many minds, some more gifted than others, and it is possible that no special credit was given to those who contributed. To make ballads was in some sense a public service, a contribution to the education or entertainment of the tribe. There was already a certain amount of literature treasured in the memory of the community, and this was constantly being revised, refashioned, and developed by all who had any gift for the work. So the ballad was the Serial Story of the times, to which anyone who had a mind could make his contribution. The stories of the tribe's past, the recollection of its warriors, the current events of the day—these were the material held in common trust to be made into literature at holiday time.

There is a large degree of truth in G. K. Chesterton's picturesque exaggeration—"a man could almost leave a poem to his son to be finished as he would have finished it, just as a man could leave a field to his son to be reaped as he would have reaped it."

Although in English literature we have no ballads that can be assigned to early history, nothing that is pre-Chaucerian, yet there can be no doubt that the 14th- and 15th-century ballad had its progenitors; for in our oldest piece of literature, the poem *Beowulf*, there are constant suggestions that the poem was made up from a collection of much earlier ballads.

Although by the 14th century the ballad had lost its original spontaneity, it had benefited in other ways by the discipline which every art must sooner or later obey. No longer did it serve music and the dance, no longer did it even ally itself with them. Its construction was now that of a plain story—still taken from the communal inheritance—with the shadow of the original accompaniments, namely refrain and repetition. Many of them retained also what must have been a powerful quality of their earlier shape—a dramatic form; and in the dialogue of the ballads we have, there is the echo of the old make-believe of the village assembly.

In a study of literature it is generally possible to trace the

gradual perfecting of a given form of expression, and to see it practised in a more polished and sophisticated form in modern literature. But the ballad died. Modern imitations of it are purely excursions into archæology. The ballad *form* is something that can be reconstructed; and if poetry were form alone, the ballad could be a current fashion in modern literature. But the ballad was more than a story in rhymes, with dialogue, or chorus: it was a manifestation of a way of life that, for good or ill, cannot be recaptured under the conditions of a modern industrial world. One interesting theory suggests that the decay of the ballad must have begun when communal authorship began to yield to individual authorship. In a sense it was the power of riches that caused the change. When class distinctions—founded as they must be on the acquisition of wealth—separated the communities from that companionship they had previously enjoyed, the people could no longer make their songs co-operative, any more than the poorer of them could eat at the rich man's table.

This theory of communal authorship is a very suggestive one, and it has been maintained with modifications or exaggerations by several eminent scholars. Other theories maintain that the ballad was the work of professional minstrels, who sang their own compositions wherever and whenever they were paid to do so; or again, that the ballad, like more modern forms, was written by individual poets, working for art's sake, whose ballads may have been publicly sung by the paid minstrel.

Whichever of these theories is adopted, the differences between the ballad form and other forms are to be attributed to the peculiar circumstances of the time of their composition. Whatever degree of individuality we allow to the makers, they had not the aloofness from everyday conditions and contact that the modern poet may enjoy. They lived in a smaller, slower world, where their neighbours, as it were, overlooked them at work, invaded their privacy, and considered it no discourtesy to amend or vary the ballads. Whatever amount of individual authorship we admit, we must also allow that the community's criticism took an active form in the way of emendation.

Poetry survived, since it is an expression that survives material prosperity or material disaster, but in a different form. The minstrel, the nobleman's retainer, became the high

priest of poetry. Literature, like religion, was organised; lost something of its elemental virtues, but gained something from ritual and sophistication. The ballad that embodied the folk-story lingered on, growing more and more degenerate, made by strolling hacks and recited to the country folk who had no longer the impulse nor the opportunity to take a hand in the game. To this extent it lives still, in the broadsheets sold at country fairs or by unemployed ex-soldiers. Poetry itself took a different road. In the hands of specialised craftsmen it took shape in new forms, such as lyric, and drama.

II

The simplicity of the ballad form makes it a convenient one for the apprentice hand to use. The subject of the poem is any tale of life, embellished with incidents that may be accurate in detail or entirely imaginary. No attempt is made to construct a background of locality, nor is a definite time indicated for the action of the story. The tale's the thing; and whatever art the ballad-writers practise is applied to the unfolding of the story in a way that shall promptly grip the audience and maintain their interest to the finish. *Chevy Chase* hurries through a formal payment of homage to the King, and, before the first short verse is finished, has given in a nutshell the burden of the whole ballad:

> "God prosper long our noble king,
> Our lives, and safeties all!
> A woeful hunting once there did
> In Chevy Chase befall."

Many devices are employed to keep the interest of the hearers. A dramatic shape may be given to the story, by the use of direct speech as in

> "The King sits in Dunfermline town,
> Drinking the blude red wine.
> 'O where will I get a skeely skipper,
> To sail this new ship of mine?'"

The trick of calling upon the audience to "join in" the chorus is not scorned to-day by pantomime singers. It is a certain way of getting people to feel that they have an interest in the performance. This was a feature of the mediæval ballad that echoes the older form when the ballad was an

accompaniment to music and dance. Thus there is the second-line refrain in *Son Davie! Son Davie!*—

> "What bluid's that on thy coat lap?
> Son Davie! Son Davie!
> What bluid's that on thy coat lap
> And the truth come tell to me O?"

And again the second line of *Binnorie* occurs as a refrain throughout the poem—

> "There were two sisters sat in a bower,
> Binnorie, O Binnorie;
> There came a knight to be their wooer
> By the bonnie mill-dams of Binnorie."

A further inheritance from the probable early form of ballad is the repetition of words or phrases found in later products, as in *Sir Patrick Spens*—

> "They hadna sailed a league, a league;
> A league but barely three,
> When the lift grew dark, and the wind blew loud,
> And gurly grew the sea."

The metrical form of the ballad was a rough approximation to stanzas made up of alternate lines of iambic tetrameter and iambic trimeter, the second and fourth lines rhyming. This was the predominating rhythm, but many irregularities were permitted and probably passed unnoticed by makers and listeners whose main interest was in the development of the action of the ballad.

There are, then, no complexities of form to make the ballad a difficult exercise. So long as the story develops speedily, the ballad-maker may commit faults of composition that the convention permits. He may trip occasionally in his rhythm, he may resort to repetition to finish a stanza that cannot conveniently contain a fresh step in the unfolding of the tale, he may permit himself license in his rhymes. Better instructions for this end may be had, perhaps, from modern ballads, many of which sustain the technique of their form more easily than the originals themselves.

Since the modern ballad is not the product of conditions which made the early ballad unique in literature, it must, however successful, be regarded entirely as an imitation product. For although an antique chair made in a modern

factory may be of more excellently finished workmanship than the genuine Jacobean or Chippendale, yet the fact remains that it is not the product of the pioneer inspiration that makes the original something rare and essentially inimitable.

J. R. Lowell's *Singing Leaves* is one of the most successful of the modern copies. It maintains the popular dialogue form: the questions of the King to his daughters three—

> "What fairings will ye that I bring?
> Said the King to his daughters three;
> For I to Vanity Fair am boun,
> Now say what shall they be?"

(Even what the cabinet-maker would call "the flaw of the original," the spelling "boun" for "bound," is carefully reproduced.) The story has a sustained interest. There are first the conventional answers of the two elder girls—

> "O bring me pearls and diamonds great,
> And gold rings for my hand."

And

> "For me bring silks that will stand alone,
> And a gold comb for my head."

The third daughter makes an answer that introduces magic into the poem—and hereafter the ballad is concerned with the strange tale of the father's quest for the Singing Leaves.

The type of ballad that was written round enchantment is marvellously achieved in Keats's *La Belle Dame Sans Merci*. A comparison of this poem with the old *Wife of Usher's Well* shows how both are a compound of credible and incredible. The Wife's three sons and the Knight-at-arms are ordinary human people, moving in a world that is the world we know; and in both poems they meet with adventures in the supernatural. This must be the most difficult kind of ballad to re-create; yet Keats's version is a splendid example. For its success, like that of its models, is that we are convinced of the reality of the tale.

The heroic ballad, of the forthright kind, like those of the Robin Hood Cycle, *Chevy Chase*, and *Patrick Spens* is more readily reproduced by modern writers. There is none of the subtlety of the supernatural to be captured; there is required simply a robust narrative. Of this kind are Longfellow's *Hesperus*, which is packed with incident from end to end, and Scott's *Lochinvar*.

One other very interesting composer of modern ballads is John Masefield, whose work has particular significance because of its origin. Masefield's finest poems are of the sea ; and his ballads recapture to a large extent the spirit of the old communal compositions. A ship's forecastle is one of the few parallels the modern world can provide to the old village assembly. And one may imagine Masefield as the tribesman of talent who improvises for the benefit of his fellows. There is a spontaneity about *Captain Stratton's Fancy* that at once suggests, perhaps not a reed-pipe or an intricate dance, but at any rate an accordion and the rhythm of crashing pannikins:

> " O some are for the lily, and some are for the rose,
> But I am for the sugar cane that in Jamaica grows ;
> For it's that that makes the bonny drink to warm my copper nose,
> Says the old bold mate of Henry Morgan."

The last line chorus would satisfy the community's desire for a share in the fun !

Virility, reality, rhythm. Here are the fundamentals of the order of the ballad. No preoccupation with an idea or a mood, such as the lyric may show, can be proper to the ballad ; no complicated verse-form ; no unfamiliarity of incident or of word. It allows a latitude that no other verse-form permits ; it gives an untrained hand the opportunity to master the first essential of literary expression—the power of describing a common experience in a direct and impressive manner ; and it familiarises him with the principle that underlies all poetry, the principle of Rhythm.

CHAPTER IV

THE EPIC

I

A STUDY of epic takes us beyond the beginnings of English Literature to the antiquity of legend and pre-history where men first began unconsciously to prepare the materials that were to be used by such poets as the author of *Beowulf*. Around its origins and authorship there is a cloud of conjecture that is not likely ever to be dispelled, although these questions retain an interest and fascination that will always attract the literary explorer.

The greatest known Epics in any language are those ascribed to Homer, *The Iliad* and *The Odyssey*, which are generally considered as a welding by skilled hands of a mass of earlier narrative ballads which were the common possession of the people. Inevitably must the epic have been preceded by this mass of unrelated literature, of undocumented history and of crude scientific research.

As in the ballad, there is on the one hand the natural or authentic epic, built up from ancient material in the manner suggested, and also there is the artificial epic, such as Milton's *Paradise Lost*. An examination of *Beowulf*, the first known English epic, will furnish a rough indication of the purpose and structure of this kind of literature.

Briefly the story is of the great feats of the hero whose name is given to the poem : a story that in all probability was woven together by some early Anglo-Saxon poet from the many ballads that must have celebrated the strong man's deeds, perhaps in days before the race left their Scandinavian home. In the unwritten poetry of early times all the later poetic forms have their origin ; the epic is the first of these to take shape.

Like the material from which it was constructed, *Beowulf* is composed partly of fact, partly of legend. The descriptions

of the Teuton ships and voyages, their houses, arms, food and drink are clearly taken from life; the background of bitter storms and winds is directly representational. On the other hand, the horrid subterranean cave where Beowulf fights the were-wolf is as obviously a mythical insertion in the story as the vast treasure guarded by the Dragon who finally gives Beowulf his death-wound.

The story is not told with the artlessness which marks the early ballads, but bears full evidence of conscious craftsmanship. The method of its composition suggests a deliberate effort to write in a style that shall reflect the vigour and heroism of the story. Here is definite authorship with a definite purpose in view. It may be surmised—unless parts of the story are lost—that the author selected from the common stock of legendary stories *three* that particularly interested him; and, in order to preserve the unity which a long poem demands, applied the three to the life of a hero who may have been known in Teutonic history, but who was more likely an invention also. These were linked together by the mass of actual description already referred to, with a skill that made the chosen incidents reveal a picture of Beowulf as a man whose existence we can believe in. This in itself is work that needs an artist for its accomplishment. But, beyond this, the author reveals that he has a religious outlook, a philosophy of life, stern and uncompromising, that colours his narrative, and that gives it the individuality which is one of the marks of all literature.

The structure of the poem is of interest in so far as it reveals characteristics of all Saxon poetry; the chief of which is alliteration. A piece chosen from a translation[1] of the West Saxon language of the original will show the effectiveness of this early literary device.

> "On slipped the hours, the ship lay on the sea
> Beneath the shelter of the hanging cliff.
> Ready upon the stern the sailors stood
> While tide-drifts drove the waters to the sand.
> Then warriors bore unto the bark's wide breast
> The wondrous gear, the glorious garb of war;
> And cheerily upon the chosen way
> The willing men launched forth the wooden ship.
> Wafted o'er tossing waters by the wind,
> The boat flew foamy-throated as a bird

[1] From *The Oxford Treasury of English Literature*, Bk. 1 (Hadow).

Flies gleaming, and the curved prow cleft the waves,
Until at dawn they saw the pleasant land
Ashine with sea-cliffs and with towering peaks
And promontories, for the waves were passed
And at their edge were all their wanderings o'er."

Each line, divided into two parts, bears four stressed syllables which fall where the speech rhythm requires them to fall : the result is a powerfully marked rhythm that strongly sustains the story.

II

In its subject-matter, every epic must narrate some great event or series of events brought into unity by virtue of the outstanding figure who is the pivot of the action of the narrative. This necessity is not really a close restriction, for the epic permits a fairly wide survey of secondary matter, and an equally broad choice of place, time, and persons. But without the welding power of the hero the narrative would lose its sustained effect and would indeed become a series of short stories. The purpose of the epic is to maintain interest in the story of a great action carried through by a great person.

The manner of treatment in the epic is narrative, a medium that has as many dangers as conveniences. Just as the narrative poem marks an advance on anything that literature had previously known, so is it a stage towards a still more successful form—viz. Drama. In Ballad, and still more so in Epic, are seen the first shoots of dramatic promise. The epic, like the drama, develops by a progression of action ; and both, again, are interested in persons. Action and character, however, are treated differently in each form. In drama, the action has a limited space of time in which to achieve its climax, and the time-limit forbids the dramatist to make any but the briefest excursions from this main road. His skill appears in the degree with which he can gather together his leading characters and their minors and hustle them toward the moment of revelation. The epic form has no such handicap. There is freedom to develop side-issues, historical and ethnological footnotes, technical descriptions of armour, ships, and buildings, pictures of countrysides. There is a speed-limit to the epic ; it definitely must not finish too soon, it must enrich itself with decoration and comparison and illustration. Although this process has clear advantages, it

requires cunning in its use. For if, as often in *Beowulf*, the writer forgets himself, his narrative suffers a weakening. All his garnishings must assist the story, not impede it. It is effective to suspend the story *for a brief time*, for thus is our anticipation sharpened; but too long a delay in resumption simply wilts our interest. The epic's purpose is to kindle, slowly, and therefore effectively, our interest in the figure and the events that the poet has selected from history or from myth or from imagination. But though his material is thus of many kinds and qualities, the great epic poet does not produce a patchwork. His epic is a crystallisation of the raw materials into a new shape and a new harmony of colour.

III

This is a convenient point at which to explain the distinction commonly made between "natural" epic and "imitative," between *Beowulf* and *Paradise Lost*. Literature begins as an expression of some primitive impulse to create and to communicate. Out of the soil of these primitive ideas and emotions sprang both ballad and epic; both in the fullest sense natural growths, the products of those thoughts and feelings that were natural to the people of the time. Thus both *The Iliad* and *Beowulf* have in their subject-matter all the stuff that was of the essence of life to the people for whom they were made. Clearly any piece of literature that adopts the same principles as these, the same form, the same attitude, in generations that no longer hold these early beliefs, must be different in texture and colour from the original work. It is not a record of the lives of contemporaries, nor a reflection of their minds. What was said of the later balladists may be repeated here of the later epic-makers—that their work is not necessarily feebler because it follows an antique pattern. It is *different*, more imaginative than real.

There is a stage in the history of a race when the atmosphere of the age favours the making of epic; and once that stage is passed, epic must become an artificial form. The characteristics of that period are a primitive mode of life, where natural rigours are to be fought with, such as climate, and enemies, and virgin soil; and parallel with this an absence of common laws and conventions and refinements. Such a people will possess rudimentary virtues, such as fearlessness, endurance, individual skill in such utilitarian crafts as house-building and

ship-building, a kind of tolerance in certain respects (since yet there is no demand for conformity in thought and belief), and a sense of individual responsibility for each man's actions, since he himself without aid of law or other protection must stand for what he does.

Roughly speaking, each man determines his own life. In such a period, the credulity that is often a feature of epic, the preparedness to swallow incredible or supernatural monstrosities, is explained when we consider that the limits and possibilities of their world had not been explored by primitive men. In such an environment, the epic grows naturally. And, that stage once passed, there comes the new way of life controlled by ordered laws and collective government.

The world is many times bigger than it was when *The Iliad* was made, so much so that no epic could take as its theme a subject that would command universal interest. War is no longer a subject that all would admit as an heroic venture; apart, possibly, from a polar explorer, there is no kind of man who could compel a general recognition of himself as the Hero. The wide diversity in opinion, religious beliefs, customs, and occupations makes it no longer possible to secure that comprehensive grip on the whole world that the epic poet needs before he can start. As Mr. Chesterton has said, "There was more unity in those times in a hundred men than there is now in one man. Then a city was like one man; now one man is like a city in a civil war."

Under such changed conditions the later epic must clearly be very different from the original type, not in form, but in scope, intention, and appeal.

IV

The story of *Paradise Lost* is as impossible for us to believe to-day as the story of *Beowulf;* but in grandeur and appeal it is truly epic. It has already been shown that the natural epic dealt with stories and myths generally accepted in their day; but *Paradise Lost* suffers from the outset because it is only too clearly a partisan story, unacceptable *in its own day* to anyone outside the Puritan camp. It was written for half a nation; an epic must be for a whole nation. Where the natural epic was impersonal, Milton's is personal. It reveals a consciousness that it is not a story that can be universally accepted, part and parcel of current belief.

A second peculiarity of this poem is the unbalanced relationship of the persons in the story. With the exception of two, all the characters are angelic. And the balance is still further threatened by the marked differences in quality between human and divine. Milton's divinities cannot have the attributes that the primitive gods (who were little more than supermen) were allowed, they cannot share in the appetites of men ; they are already becoming abstract and remote. To make the One God of Puritan England an epic figure was a justifiable experiment but a too difficult task.

As though he realised the impossibility, in his time, of realising completely the epic style, Milton has carried out some of the epic conventions in a new way. Thus instead of the direct contemporary account of life that *Beowulf* provides there is in *Paradise Lost* a mass of scientific, philosophic, and religious learning and opinion, skilfully introduced by the device of lengthy similes, which not only serve their purpose of illustrating the matter but are in themselves beautiful or impressive. The defect of balance already referred to seriously limits dramatic possibilities ; any exchange between a man and a god may be tragic, but not dramatic. Yet when this difference of degree is absent, where the persons are each other's peers (as at the Council of the Fallen Angels), the poem can become dramatic. There the situation is at once alive and dangerous : the clash of the extremist Moloch with the more subtle Belial ; the eager, passionate exchanges between the two sides.

In several directions, however, *Paradise Lost* conforms to the traditional epic style. The action of the poem begins promptly, after the usual introduction, with an account of the expulsion of the rebel angels into the void, the Hell, where they first plan their revenge—the seduction of God's new creature, Man. In successive books, the action is set in motion elsewhere, in Heaven and on Earth. Between the fifth and ninth books the action is suspended in favour of an account of Satan's rebellion and of Adam's first days on earth ; to be resumed again in the later books, so preserving the unity of the action. The long speeches of the poem are in the epic style, as are the very fine descriptive passages such as those that picture the scenes in Hell in the opening books.

The verse-form of the poem was, again, experimental. The blank-verse form that had been perfected by Shakespeare had

so far been used only for dramatic verse. Milton used it to win a mastery over words that will not easily be surpassed. As a classical scholar he disciplined blank verse without blighting it. He schooled it to take new variations, of pause, or of stress, so giving the verse-form an elasticity that never hampered the underlying sense of rhythm. How this was accomplished is seen in an almost random selection from the poem, the description of Beelzebub rising like

> "A pillar of state. Deep on his front engraven
> Deliberation sat and public care;
> And princely counsel in his face yet shone,
> Majestic though in ruin. Sage he stood,
> With Atlantean shoulders fit to bear
> The weight of mightiest monarchies; his look
> Drew audience and attention still as night,
> Or summer's noon-tide air."

The first line shows Milton's readiness to give up the normal five-foot iambic line and vary his stress for an obvious effect. The skilful variation of pause, where the lines are regular iambic, shows that his resources were wide and successful.

Milton's eminence as a master of words rests on *Paradise Lost* as much as on any of his other poems. Any random page provides a word that, without sacrificing its meaning, evokes some memorable image. Particularly is this so with the proper names—Satan standing

> "Like Teneriffe or Atlas, unremov'd,
> His statue reached the sky, and on his crest
> Sat Horror plumed."

He marshals all the chivalry of the world in the magic of his description of the rebel host, greater in power than all the knights who

> "Jousted in Aspramont or Montalban,
> Damasco or Morocco or Trebisond,
> Or whom Biserta sent from Afric shore
> When Charlemain with all his peerage fell
> By Fontarabia."

V

The Arthurian legends had suggested themselves to Milton as offering scope for an epic: and Tennyson actually attempted to use that material for the purpose. The body of the numerous ancient legends had been worked up by Sir Thomas Malory

in the 15th century into a long book, *Morte d'Arthur*, part a translation from other languages, and part, no doubt, original work or at least a variation of existing stories. But in his book there is no unity of action, no coherence of plot.

Nor does Tennyson improve on Malory in this respect. True, the figure of Arthur repeatedly appears, but he does not tower above the other knights, nor is he the pivot of all they do. Each story presents a new hero. There is no main event running through *Morte d'Arthur*, of which the various stories might be offshoots ; nor are these stories to any extent connected. In short, *Morte d'Arthur*, depending on earlier ballads as *Beowulf* did, has not been worked into epic form. The material is there, but unprepared and unedited.

Tennyson's age, to a much greater degree than Milton's, had lost interest in what had been the chief interest of the natural epic : i.e. the merely valiant side of human nature. More, too, than Milton, Tennyson had an ardent moral purpose in these poems. In so far as the Knights of the Round Table were the types of fine manhood warring against wickedness, there are affinities to *The Faery Queene*. From Tennyson's reported conversations there is no doubt that the Idylls were principally allegorical in their intention. To encase moral virtues in armour and set them jousting is a difficult business. The armour cannot hide them and cannot hold them. For his purpose the tales of elementary valour and passion collected by Malory were singularly unsatisfactory for Tennyson's object. The events of the Idylls seem pallid and mock-valiant, the figures are statuary.

Ruskin's opinion of them was, "I feel the art and 'finish' in these poems a little more than I like to feel it." But though *The Idylls of the King* fails to be epic, it is a fine piece of literary workmanship. It displays a masterly command of words, a power of evoking vivid images, and unusual skill in the dangerous trick of handling extended similes.

VI

William Morris, in passionate revolt against the ugliness of modern industrialism, looked back into the Middle Ages for the image of Beauty. Among his discoveries was the Icelandic saga of Sigurd the Volsung—" the Great Story of the North which should be to all our race what the Tale of Troy was to the Greeks." In his verse rendering of this story Morris's

vehement nature found its completest literary expression. He managed to get into the poem that sense of exultation which the oldest epics convey, and moreover to flavour it with the pungent quality of the Northern seas and the Northern race.

Sigurd is developed in four Books. The first shapes the setting and gives the atmosphere of the story, and from the beginning one feels the keen, strong rhythm of the poem :

" There was a dwelling of kings ere the world was waxen old ;
Dukes were the door-wards there, and the roofs were thatched with gold ;
Earls were the wrights that wrought it, and silver nailed its doors ;
Earls' wives were the weaving-women, queens' daughters strewed its floors,
And the masters of its song-craft were the mightiest men that cast
The sails of the storm of battle adown the bickering blast."

After this rather prolonged introduction, Sigurd son of Sigmund makes his appearance as a boy learning " the craft of battle," " the tongues of many countries," " the dealing with the harpstrings and the winding ways of song." Thereafter he sets himself to deeds of valour, from one of which, loaded with the treasure of Andvari, he climds to Hindfell, the roof of the world. There he meets and loves Brynhild, the enchanted princess.

Book Three tells of his journey to the Nibelungs, of a wizardry which compels him to marry the lady Gudrun and a similar deception which marries Brynhild to Gudrun's brother ; of Sigurd's recovery from the charm and his avowal of love for Brynhild ; of his death at the hands of another of Gudrun's brothers ; of Brynhild's suicide ; and of the burning of the dead lovers on the same pyre.

The last Book unfolds the tragic aftermath. The lust for vengeance and the lust for Andvari's treasure entangle Gudrun and her brothers and her second husband in a net of disaster and sudden death ; and the poem ends with Gudrun's sacrificial offering of her own life to " the measureless flood of the sea."

These incidents, evidently, are the accustomed ones of Northern sagas ; but here they are pieced together with an ingenuity that is lacking in early epic. *Sigurd* is, however, more than a well-arranged story, and more than a clever reproduction of epic atmosphere. After some slight faltering in the first Book, the tale is marked by a strong unity. The

tragedy of Sigurd and his two lovers dominates the epic, and, as tragedy must, rises above its localised setting into a universal significance. It is not merely a narrative of past events, but a symbolisation of the defeat and the triumph of Love.

Morris's reputation as a craftsman is fully sustained by this work. His careful imitation of such distinctive marks of early English epic as alliteration is only a minor feature of *Sigurd*. Much more notable is his success with an experimental verse-metre. Of his many metrical innovations, the one he used here is the most brilliant. It is a riming couplet of six feet to the line, but containing many variations within the individual foot-units. For a "Tale of the Mighty North" this six-foot measure is entirely appropriate. It is sturdy and big, yet never rigid. Like the Northern warrior it is a compound of strength and grace. The use of riming couplets for narrative is risky, for the quick-recurring rime tends to check the speed of the story. But the prospect of such a hold-up seldom appears in *Sigurd*. The extra foot (as compared with the usual narrative metre) partly discounts the risk of jerkiness which the short "wave-length" of the rimes might cause. Secondly, the skilful variety in the kind of foot employed induces a flexibility which counteracts the monotonous insistence of the rimes; and thirdly, Morris writes with an exuberance which not even the couplet can restrain. The rime of this poem has, in fact, an especially apt effect, for it gives to each pair of lines a stamping, ringing sound which admirably consorts with the story of pagan pageantry and conflict.

VII

One of the characteristics of parody is that it devotes a very close attention to the form it is trifling with and often succeeds in a perfect counterfeit of the appearance of the original. As an exercise in this medium Pope's *The Rape of the Lock* shows off excellently the more obvious features of the epic. The poem deals in the soberest fashion with an absurd subject—the snipping off of one of Belinda's locks by a low fellow under the intoxicating influence of coffee. The events that succeed this outrage are narrated in solemn fashion, with all the traditional trimmings of the epic style; such as the painstaking account of Belinda's toilet, the intervention of the supernatural. *The Rape of the Lock* incidentally bears a characteristic of the epic which Pope had not designed to

parody; for it reveals the manners of the Augustan age completely, its polished vanity and its insensitiveness to fine feeling.

Still another successful verse-form is introduced into epic writing by Pope—the heroic couplet of the classics, the paradoxical epigrammatic form that enabled a wit to express himself with point and brilliance within the confines of two lines. With such a sharp instrument Pope could etch an exquisite picture of Belinda—

> "On her white breast a sparkling Cross she wore
> Which Jews might kiss and infidels adore . . .
> Favour to none, to all she smiles extends,
> Oft she rejects, but never once offends.
> Bright as the sun, her eyes the gazers strike,
> And, like the sun, they shine on all alike."

Or the cynical brevity of his description of sunset as the time when

> "The hungry Judges soon the sentence sign
> And wretches hang, that jurymen may dine;
> The merchant from the Exchange returns in peace,
> And the long labours of the Toilet cease."

CHAPTER V

THE LYRIC

I

THE Lyric is, of all literary forms, the most closely connected with Music. It is reasonable to suppose that originally it appeared at the early communal assemblies, where the dance and the story (the ballad) were varied by some kind of song, e.g. an invocation to some Power. And it is equally easy to appreciate that the influence of strong drink or love would from early times call for some kind of song. The first characteristic of the lyric is this expression of personal feeling ; and in the earliest English literature there are many examples of this personal response to some stirring emotion. The blithe and joyous *Cuckoo Song* (written in the early 13th century) is one of the clearest examples of this natural impulse to song under the influence of some strong feeling.

The lyric, then, like the ballad, is an entirely " natural " expression and as such is to be found from early days in English literature. What Anglo-Saxon poetry has been preserved contains some of this lyric element, this suggestion of *personal* feeling ; but it was the French influence after the Norman Conquest which made this personal note fashionable in poetry. The more melancholy and phlegmatic Saxon genius fell under the domination of the Troubadours, who were scattering their songs of frank revelation and avowal over the breadth of Europe. The musical basis of the lyric was already established : the Troubadours helped to shape it by stanza and rime. In the 13th and 14th centuries the native lyric had seized the French note of sprightliness, and at the same time acquired the more courtly and polished manner of versification.

The extraordinary development of Music during the 15th century had a further determining effect upon the nature of

the lyric. Success in one art stimulates new effort in a sister art; and the lute melodies of Weelkes, Dowland, Byrd, and the rest evoked songs which, in spirit and in form, were worthy of their accompaniments. To this wedding of the two arts certain acquired characteristics of the lyric may be due. If a melody is too long sustained it loses its unity and becomes a piece of a larger pattern. So with the lyric. The limit is soon reached of what may be said of my mistress's eyes; prolonged beyond what intuition directs, the praise will become tedious. No emotion can be truly sustained beyond a moment, and its expression must be similarly limited. As the lute was a singularly melodious instrument, so there was a corresponding richness of sounds in the lyric; and as music was sound duly ordered, so the lyric obeyed the discipline of metre and rime. But although the Elizabethan lyric probably owed this debt to music, its later development was independent of the sister art.

The lyric must restrict itself to the expression of one emotion or one thought. A simple and clear account of the frame of mind in which a lyric is written has been given by Mr. James Welsh, the miner M.P. "I was out bird's-nesting. Suddenly I saw a lark soar in the air. I had seen the same sight thousands of times, but somehow that day it took hold of me. . . . I said 'Why have I never seen and heard it like this before?'" Mr. Walter de la Mare has recorded a similar experience: "At that very instant as our young eyes met across the wintry air, the last of the evening's robins broke into its tiny shrill, almost deafening, peal of notes. And fled. What is it in such moments that catches the heart back, and stamps them on the memory as if they were tidings of another world?" Such an instant, "recollected in tranquillity" by such a personality, will produce a lyric.

When the poet has a vision of a new Jerusalem, or of a skylark, or of a sleeping city, the thought or the sight "takes hold of him" until expression is given to them. Clearly such a moment may occur during a play or a novel, when the writer is thus moved by some single feeling: the expression of it is a lyric. For example, in the Plays, Shakespeare is often impelled from his immediate concern to write lines of blank-verse lyric (these altogether apart from the songs incorporated in the play). Such lyric passages are those from *Twelfth Night*, "If music be the food of love, play on . . .",

"She never told her love . . .", and "Make me a willow cabin at your gate. . . ." These illustrate the theory of a modern poet and critic[1] that lyric is the essence of poetry. The lyric displays a pure poetic energy not associated with any other of those energies that the making of a play or story requires. Since none of the poet's power is used up in controlling plot or characterisation, all of it can be released into that brief moment of exaltation in which pure poetry is created.

The play and the story, like the lyric, must have unity. Yet in them the observer is always conscious of the effort to preserve that unity. He sees the details of scenes and characters introduced definitely for that end. He can, so to speak, see the conjuror preparing his sleight of hand. But in the lyric he sees only the sudden achievement of magic. The lyric is a spontaneous expression of something momentarily seen or felt. The poet is not required to follow a fixed method, but rather to produce something that instantly moves his listener. It follows then that he may adopt any form of construction that will best create that impression. It must not be supposed that the act of creation of a lyric is as swift as the emotion that begets it. Mr. W. B. Yeats expresses the real relation between the impulse and the actual making—

> "A line will take us hours maybe;
> Yet if it does not seem a moment's thought,
> Our stitching and unstitching has been naught."

The making of a lyric is an elaborate craft, but in the finished product Art must conceal Art, and the result must appear spontaneous and effortless.

The earlier stages of lyric-writing are, in fact, largely effortless. Rarely does the poet settle deliberately on any form; but the idea is born as miraculously as a child is born, with a form and appearance of its own. The poet's duty is to see that the lyric grows up in the way it should go.

From a curious condition of uneasiness which precedes the act of creation the idea definitely establishes itself in the poet's mind; and this idea generally appears in the shape of a whole line or even a whole verse. This is the crisis of creation, for the line or verse which "appears" in this manner determines the rhythm or the stanza-form of the entire poem. From this

[1] Mr. John Drinkwater.

point on, the lyric may develop in various ways. Sometimes the first line, like a magnet, draws other lines to itself, arranging them like " lines of force " in relation to itself. Sometimes the rest of the poem is with careful deliberation built up on the model of its first verse or line.

Not seldom the poet finds it hard to sustain the ecstasy of his first idea. Any anthology will yield a crop of poems whose opening lines are the best. Byron's " She walks in beauty like the night " never lives up to its first line ; after writing down the words " Toll for the Brave ! " Cowper never attained the same grandeur in the rest of the poem ; in the effort to sustain itself through two more verses Poe's " To Helen " loses the spontaneous beauty of its opening stanza.

II

As a carefully ordered form, the Elizabethan lyric owes as much to foreign models as to the native musical impetus. Two English travellers in Italy returned to practise forms that were already flourishing there. Sir Thomas Wyatt and the Earl of Surrey introduced the love-song cycles that were then fashionable in Italy. Since love is one of the most intimate emotions, such models would emphasise the personal character of lyric poetry. Their innovations into English poetry were not limited to this, however, for under continental influence they followed such important lyrical forms as the sonnet. The ease of their accomplishment is to be seen in such pieces as Wyatt's " Forget Not Yet " or " Be still my Lute, for I have done."

From their pioneering the later Elizabethans cultivated lyric forms that make their age as great in Song as in Drama. During the second half of the 16th century many anthologies of contemporary verse were issued—*Tottel's Miscellany, The Paradise of Dainty Devices, A Handful of Pleasant Delights,* and *England's Helicon.* Besides these there were the sonnet sequence of Spenser's *Amoretti,* and Shakespeare's *Sonnets,* and Sidney's *Astrophel and Stella.*

The most popular lyric form appears to have been the sonnet. Within a definitely limited space, the poet has to give expression to his emotion. Such a restriction is likely to exhibit the power of the capable poet, just as it must reveal the inadequacies of the less gifted one. In its first form, the sonnet followed the style of Petrarch : fourteen

iambic lines each of ten syllables, divided, at the eighth line, into an octave and a sestette. In the first eight lines, only two rimes were permitted—abba, abba ; while in the sestette either two or three were permitted, to be used in alternative combinations. There was no break in the sequence of the poem at the end of the octave, but rather a change of tone. The octave gave out the theme ; the sestette made a pithy declaration upon that theme. Thus in Sidney's famous " With how sad steps, O moon, thou climbst the skies " the octave describes the moon as a sufferer from Love's arrows who may be expected to have sympathy with an earthly victim of the same fate. The sestette demands to know if, of his experience, the Moon can testify to faults common to woman and goddess. There is no break of the unity of the poem, the two sections simply have different functions within the same purpose.

The other type of sonnet, called, after its greatest exponent, Shakespearean, has some important differences from the Italian form. The fourteen (iambic) line form is retained, but instead of the eight-six pattern the lines fall into a twelve-two scheme. The " conclusion " of the poem is now to be attained not in six lines but in two ; the result being a final epigrammatic couplet. (The rime form of this sonnet is also a variation of the Italian form ; three quatrains of alternately rhyming lines, and a final rimed couplet.) The telling effect of the final couplet is nowhere better seen than in Sonnet CXXX, " My mistress' eyes are nothing like the sun." The sonnet catalogues the plain qualities of the lady in downright unromantic terms : yet concludes in that amazingly passionate testimony—

> " And yet, by heaven, I think my love as rare
> As any she belied with false compare."

Drayton has used a combination of these sonnet forms in " Since there's no help come let us kiss and part." The rime form is that of the Shakespearean sonnet, yet the construction is definitely " eight and six." The octave announces the separation between the poet and his love. The sestette is a personification of the death of Love, yet swelling up in the Shakespearean manner into that last great couplet—

> " Now if thou would'st, when all have given him over,
> From death to life thou might'st him yet recover."

The second favourite lyric form of the Elizabethans was the Song. Here the words were not pegs upon which to hang a melody, but had a music of their own, so that in the fullest sense words and music were a harmony.

In these songs there is a very wide range of variety, in length, in metre, and in rime schemes, conforming to the manifold kinds of personality that the songs express. A study of Elizabethan lyrics shows that the greatest amount of poetry was written on the subject of love; but there was infinite variety in the treatment of the theme, e.g. Marlowe's "Shepherd-love" convention," Lodge's "Song of Rosaline," and Shakespeare's songs. Side by side with this flourished the poetry of patriotism—practised by such men as Drayton and Daniel. Whatever their subject, the Elizabethans sang it with grace and enthusiasm.

The Elizabethan age, in drama as well as lyric, produced a considerable amount of "artificial" work, of imitations that, conforming in style, lack the passion and freshness that stamps real literature. This deficiency was largely due to a copying of classical models. The native lyrical gift is seen in Jonson's *Drink to me Only*, where the underlying iambic metre is so subtly handled (by the device of "substitution") as to emphasise the lover's earnestness:

> "Drink to me only with thine eyes
> And I will pledge with mine."

On the other hand, Marlowe's equally well-known song *Come live with me and be my Love* is a very conscious exercise on a model that was fashionable in its day. The metre is regular, the images are the conventional ones of the pastoral, the poem is nicely rounded off:

> "If these delights thy mind may move
> Then live with me and be my love."

There is prettiness in it, but no suggestion of any of the qualities that make poetry—no beauty, no strangeness, no mystery.

After Milton had enriched it by his characteristic sonnets, the poetry of the Jacobeans showed a sickening from the freshness and strength of the Elizabethan lyric. It wandered into regions of subject-matter that do not seem able to sustain poetry—into philosophy and religion; and it flourished only

when a poet such as Herrick neglected his " noble numbers " to sing unsophisticated songs to daffodils.

In the Elizabethan tradition falls the best of Herrick's work, Suckling's, and the few, perfect lyrics of Lovelace. The poetry of religious and philosophic reflection was practised by Donne, Crashaw, and Vaughan. A comparison of the work of these two groups will reveal the difference in their power of making genuine lyric.

During this period the lyric suffered an accompanying handicap at the hands of some poets who wished for more restraint in the lyric form. Waller and Cowley were the principal advocates of the couplet; and if they did not thereby prosper the lyric, they did prepare a useful form which Dryden and Pope were later to use for poetry of a different kind.

Of the Caroline lyric all that need be said here is that it suffered the same eclipse as the Drama, and for the same reasons.

The Age of Good Sense was clearly no atmosphere for the lyric. Of excellent verse composition it produced a good deal, while, of course, it excelled in prose. The exclusion of lyric poetry from this age is accounted for when it is remembered that the outlook and philosophy of the time were marked by none of that spirit of adventure that had first made the lyric. The Augustan Age believed what it saw, and closed its mind to the two chief begetters of Poetry—mystery and sensitiveness to beauty; it concerned itself with the immediate ways and manners of the day, never with those exciting uncharted areas of mind and heart where the imagination may find man's deepest longings. This attitude expressed itself in verse that was as well made, as rightly cut and stitched, as a Court dress. But it frowned upon any individual variation from type. The patterns were fixed, modelled in fact upon antiquarian discoveries in classical literature. The period decided that these models were best fitted for its purpose, and it followed them vigorously.

Yet in the closing years of this century the old lyrical impulse began to re-surge into English poetry. This revival is called the Romantic simply because it renews the quest for the ideal, the wonderful, the mysterious, which had characterised Renaissance poetry. It was, too, a manifestation of the swelling demand for freedom, for the breaking of shackles,

political or literary, that bound men to custom. It was a demand that, in his life or in his poetry, man should design his own pattern, fulfil his own desires.

The lyric was reborn in the best circumstances, in a passion of mental and emotional escape from a suffocating age. The emergence of the Romantic Revival from the 18th century is vividly described in *The Village Labourer*[1]: "All literature and all that really belong to the 18th century are the language of a little society of men and women who lived with one set of ideas; who understood each other; who were not tormented by any anxious or bewildering problems; who lived in comfort, and, above all things, in composure. The classics were their freemasonry. . . . In comparison with the dishevelled century that follows, the 18th century was neat, well-dressed, and nicely appointed. . . . To pass from the 18th century to the Revolution, from Pope to Blake, from Sheridan to Shelley, is to burst from this little hothouse of sheltered and nurtured elegance into an infinite wild garden of romance and mystery."

The Spirit of this Age created the lyric of the Romantic Revival, and expressed itself through that unparalleled galaxy, Burns, Wordsworth, Coleridge, Byron, Shelley, and Keats. And each of these individually contributed to the Revival both in subject-matter and in form. Burns was the John the Baptist of the new faith, uncouth and prophetic; prophetic because he discovered poetry in the countryside of the Scotch peasant. The delight of all these poets in the mystery and picturesqueness of nature is a characteristic of Romanticism: that wonder and strangeness and beauty of the visible world that in turn stimulates an adventuring into the world of things unseen.

In Burns and Wordsworth particularly, poetry became humanity's inheritance again. Both were inspired by the rediscovery of the ballad (e.g. 1765, Percy's *Reliques*), where they found enthusiasm and reality and simplicity. Coleridge spanned the gap between reality and the fantastic; Shelley sang untiringly of the triumph of Love and Liberty, and Keats of the triumph of Beauty.

The subject-matter of the Romantic Revival demanded a change of form. Even during the classical supremacy experiment had constantly threatened the heroic couplet—blank

[1] J. L. and Barbara Hammond.

verse and the Spenserian stanza had roused the anger of that defender of the proprieties, Dr. Johnson; while the sonnet, banished by the Augustans, persistently reappeared after the middle of the century.

The full development of the Romantic movement into the variety of preoccupations just mentioned was paralleled by a similar series of verse-forms. For the first time in England lyric poetry was unconfined to any conventional subject-matter, such as had limited the possibilities of the Elizabethan "amoretti." It was now become the expression of social and political ideas, the song of the countryside, the praise of earthly beauty, the distillation of fantasy. For such varied expression it required a variety of verse-forms. In this period experiment provided the poets with measures that were adequate. A few of their patterns will be noted in the next section in the hope that their variety and ingenuity will send the reader to discover the host of other examples that the work of these poets provides.

In Shelley's lyrics the thought or emotion seems to take charge of the verse-form at once. It seems reasonable to suppose that at the outset the pattern was thus dictated by the poet's emotion. Thereafter, however, there is the revelation of considerable skill in writing, variations on the original rhythm, in coaxing it to lend itself to successive developments of the lyric idea.

The richness of imagery that is typical of Shelley and Keats is a reflection of the passion of their spirits. In *To a Skylark* that passion becomes an ecstasy during which the bird takes on incredible shapes in a succession of breathless transformations. In the *Ode to a Nightingale* a similar passion moulds images that blend into each other as in a kaleidoscope. The language of the Romantic lyrics shows the combination of instinct and art in the poets who used it; the poet's singular faculty for lighting on the exact epithet, and the conscious artist's eye for effect and colour and rime.

Much misunderstanding has arisen from Wordsworth's statement of his theory of poetic diction. Wordsworth condemned fashions in poetry that sacrificed poetic passion for the artifices that were merely an imitation of classical poetry. Like a thoroughgoing propagandist he may have overstated his case; but the value of his contentions was in their implication that the diction of poetry should be *natural expression*.

Following Burns, Wordsworth found a new power in the conditions and scenes of rustic life. To transfer that subject-matter into poetry something more than a command of dialect was needed. But Wordsworth was near enough to the truth that, as far as subject-matter exists, there are no exclusively "poetic" subjects, and that as regards diction, poetry can be made of words that are in everyday use. Side by side with this conception of poetic diction, however, flourishes the mediævalism in phrase and image of Keats, and the elusive other-worldliness of Shelley.

The Romantic inspiration is carried on in the latter part of the same century by one of the most accomplished of all literary craftsmen. Tennyson's work is a curious revelation of what a man may do who has none of that impelling passion that generally lies in the heart of Poetry. Ingenious rhythm, felicity of rhyming, command of every conceivable literary device, are the powers by which he holds us in poems that in regard to their ideas must be labelled "Victorian." The placid, strictly "moral" outlook of the poet has perhaps been epitomised in the nickname applied to him by Mr. James Joyce—"Lawn Tennyson." He is as successful in the kind of poetry that Wordsworth preached in his theory of diction (see *The Lord of Burleigh*) as in the romantic mediæval workmanship of the *Idylls*. His skill in the technique of vowel-music is evident in thousands of his lines, his imagery is made from a careful observation of natural phenomena, his metres are extraordinarily sensitive to the matter they are conveying, and the mixing of metres in response to a change of feeling in a poem is done with unerring command. In all the *practice* of poetry Tennyson is a master.

His contemporary, Swinburne, was an equally finished technician, possessing, however, a temperament and an outlook far more vigorous than Tennyson's. In his lyrics there are constant reminiscences of Shelley; the same passion for liberty, the same vibrant rhythms (as in the *Hymn to Proserpine*), the same fertility in picture-making, compounded perhaps with Tennyson's power of a naturalist's observation. Nowhere more than in Swinburne's poetry will be found the wide variety of metres that is characteristic of all the later 19th-century poets.

The 20th century possesses more lyric poets than any other. Partly because perspective is necessary for sound judgment,

but more because of a curious unwillingness to admit our contemporaries to the company of the great poets, the quality of their work cannot yet be authoritatively assessed. Yet no student of poetry can afford to neglect the wealth of lyric composition of the Georgian poets. Personalities and interests as diverse as may be imagined have produced this poetry. Two tendencies of it may be noticed here. First, there is the modern practice of models recognised in the English lyric form, poetry which reflects, in language and imagery that are of course coloured by the 20th century, emotions and thoughts that were the experience of all ages, as of our own. Secondly, there is the expression of the experience peculiar to this age, in verse that is not simply " coloured " by the present generation but much more fundamentally affected ; so affected as to demand such novel rhythms as " free verse," and such images that were previously considered either not proper or else not strictly poetical : as in the description of a day's end—

> " At the violet hour, when the eyes and back
> Turn upward from the desk, when the human engine waits,
> Like a taxi throbbing, waiting."

An unflinching probing into the meaning of life under modern conditions is the business of this kind of poetry. This, taken with the very acute (and sometimes ungoverned) perceptions that reveal themselves in unexpected and unfamiliar images, sometimes suggests a precocity in the modern lyric of this type. But there is a danger of condemning any literature that is unintelligible to us, for one of the marks of any poetry is its deeper penetration into life than the majority of us can achieve.

Of the first type, the expression of universal experience through accepted forms of lyric verse, there are many composers. In all of them " influences " of the older lyricists are inevitably seen ; and whether such influences are consciously felt by the poet or not, it is possible to trace them. Thomas Hardy, Walter de la Mare, W. B. Yeats, Robert Bridges, W. H. Davies, Ralph Hodgson, John Masefield, John Drinkwater, A. E. Housman—all have their affinities, which an interested student may discover by the comparative method. Yet none of them are copyists. Most of them have invented or adapted rhythms that are new to literature, others have practised the old conventions with a new vigour and a modern

individuality, e.g. Masefield's philosophic sonnets, and W. H. Davies's pastorals.

Of the second type, the anthologies are unrepresentative. It is not enough to dismiss this poetry as " mere realism " or " incomprehensible modernism." He who hath ears to hear will find a new significance in the work of T. S. Eliot, Lascelles Abercrombie, Freeman, the later Graves, Harold Monro, etc., whose subject-matter no less than their poetic style is drawn from the problems and necessities of their own age.

III

The remaining portion of this chapter will be concerned with a further examination of certain lyric features that have already been mentioned in Section I, and that will have been noticed by the student who has examined the work of those poets named in Section II.

Half a dozen poems will be used to illustrate three points :

(1) The structure of the lyric.
(2) The obedience of form to subject-matter in the lyric.
(3) The lyric as an expression of individuality.

For the purpose indicated, the following lyrics are chosen :

(*a*) Shakespeare : *It was a lover and his lass.*
(*b*) Herrick : *To Daffodils.*
(*c*) Burns : *A Farewell.*
(*d*) Wordsworth : *She dwelt among the untrodden ways.*
(*e*) Tennyson : *The Brook.*
(*f*) De la Mare : *Nod.*

Dissection of poetry is to be tolerated only so far as it may give the student a necessary knowledge of the anatomy of poetry, and so it shall be done as quickly and delicately as possible.

(*a*) Two stanzas purely descriptive, with a gay chorus ; third stanza the statement of the poet's idea ; life is brief, " therefore take the present time."

(*b*) First stanza : descriptive of the brief life of the daffodils ; second stanza, the idea presented : humanity's span of life is as brief.

c) First three stanzas descriptive of the warrior's prepara-

tion for the battle; fourth, the idea of the poem revealed—Love tempts the warrior from the fight.

(*d*) Two stanzas and half the third describe the modest unknown Lucy. The last half stanza expresses the fundamental emotions of the poem—

> "But she is in her grave, and, Oh,
> The difference to me!"

(*e*) A whole poem of descriptive matter. The idea is no more than indicated—the eternal existence of the Brook. This is introduced regularly in stanzas three, six, nine, and is finally driven home by its repetition in the last stanza:

> "Men may come and men may go,
> But I go on for ever."

(*f*) Four stanzas describing the homeward way of the old shepherd; the idea very beautifully and subtly implied in the fifth stanza: the utter serenity of pastoral life.

From this data it may be assumed that lyrics have generally this much of their method in common: a statement of the situation that has moved them, leading to a climax which expresses the mood aroused by that situation. In each of the poems the composer is meditating upon something seen or experienced, until that meditation breaks through into some expression of the actual emotion or idea that it engenders. The "statement" may be brief or prolonged according to the urgency of the oncoming climax. The emotion may endure restraint while the exposition is being developed; it may gain in its cumulative effect (see Drayton's sonnet, and Shelley's *To a Skylark*) by being so restrained; or it may suffer (as in Cowper's second poem to Mary Unwin). If it cannot so endure it will burst out, perhaps at once, as it does in Laurence Binyon's

> "O world, be nobler for her sake!
> If she but knew thee what thou art,
> What wrongs are borne, what deeds are done
> In thee, beneath thy daily sun,
> Know'st thou not that her tender heart
> For pain and very shame would break?
> O world, be nobler for her sake!"

A complete reversion of this "progressive" method is sometimes found, where the climax is expressed first and

subsequently accounted for. The obvious gain in this method is a dramatic one, as in Vaughan's *Vision* with its astonishing first line:

> "I saw Eternity the other night,
> Like a great ring of pure and endless light,
> All calm, as it was bright;
> And round beneath it Time, in hours, days, years,
> Driven by the spheres,
> Like a vast shadow moved; in which the World
> And all her train were hurl'd."

The lyric is sometimes simply Song, wholly unsophisticated, and springing not from reflection or slowly crystallising emotion, but from elemental irresponsible joy: as in Nashe's *Spring Song*, the construction of which is a series of parallel expressions of the one inspiring emotion, not leading to any climax, but repeating itself ecstatically in different words for each stanza.

There is yet another kind of lyric; which offers no direct expression of idea or feeling, but creates a vision of some scene. Much of this poetry is not, however, to be classified simply as "descriptive." A poet who describes a moonlight night may not say in so many words what feeling the sight roused in him, yet clearly there is implicit in what he writes the echo of the excitement that held his mind when the poem was conceived. Shelley's fragment *Art thou pale for weariness* is primarily one of the most perfect descriptions of the Moon: and it is, too, a record of the spirit of a poet who, for that moment, was incredibly lonely and weary. Flecker's *A Ship, an Isle, a Sickle Moon* conveys more than the actual scene of tropic enchantment; it permits us to share the magic mood which for an instant pervaded the mind where the poem was wrought.

One more kind of lyric structure may be noted, in which the general theme is given out in the opening stanza, and varied in a series of parallel stanzas. Wither's *Shall I, wasting in despair* illustrates this method. The idea governing the poem is at once indicated: He will love no woman for her qualities, but for herself. This idea is illustrated by four stanzas each dealing with one of these qualities that, *alone*, are inadequate: Beauty, Good Nature, Nobility, Rank. The final stanza summarises the attitude expressed in these four variations. Any one of the stanzas might

stand alone as a complete expression of the general idea of the poem.

These examples by no means exhaust the extent to which lyric structure varies in English poetry, but they will suggest that very wide variety of construction which obviously cannot wholly be classified.

The style of any lyric is determined by its subject-matter. To what extent this dominion of subject-matter over form exists will depend considerably upon the personality of the poet. The composer whose mind is acutely sensitive to the emotion that creates poetry will consciously or unconsciously allow his subject to indicate the rhythm of the general style of his poem, however much he may afterwards, as a skilled craftsman, avail himself of one device or another to give his poem finish. On the other hand, the composer whom one suspects of insensitiveness to emotion—who seems to lack sincerity—will reveal himself in his work as a much more *conscious* maker than the other, as one who is working mainly by convention and knowledge of poetic technique. Since personality is so great a factor in this matter we shall expect to find the poetry of the first kind in the work of the Romantic poets (including here of course the Elizabethans), and to find the second kind of poetry in those periods when classical example was considered more desirable than individual expression. Work of this later type has already been indicated, e.g. (1) the stereotyped pastoral of Marlowe, and many of the "Italian" sonnets of the late 16th century, where the main object of the writer seems to have been accomplished imitation of an historical model, (2) the bulk of the verse of the "Age of Reason," where expression was jacketed into classical forms. Outside these periods, however, a similar style may be found. So the work of Tennyson frequently suggests the over-elaboration of technique in an unimpassioned development of a subject.

The following examples of lyric form that are governed by their subject can do no more than suggest a fuller examination by the student of this important feature of great poetry.

(1) The songs that Shakespeare included in several of the plays can be taken from their context without any risk of damaging them. The theme of each is derived from the subject of the play; but in themselves these songs give an answer to the question: What is a lyric?

Thus Amiens' song *Under the Greenwood Tree* gives an impression of the " simple life " as it appears to the emancipated courtiers ; the play itself gives no *completer* impression, but a fuller, more developed one. The song reveals the joys of that life as they present themselves spontaneously and in a concentrated fashion to *one mind ;* the play reveals them as they appear continuously through the development of the comedy and through *a variety of minds.* These songs thus achieve in their short duration a very complete exposition of a theme that is being dramatically expressed in the play as a whole. They are deeply responsive to this subject-matter ; and they invariably fall into a pattern that is obviously determined by this prevailing mood.

For example, the Boy's Song in *Measure for Measure* is a perfect miniature of the pathos of love. It is a sorrow that in actual life can express itself in the simplest words, and in that echoing repetition that is natural to any lament. The one image that it contains, " Lights that do mislead the morn," is Elizabethan in its vividness, yet universally human to the poetry that springs to the lips of the dullest lover.

(2) Drayton's sonnet, monosyllabic and, at the last, so finely paradoxical is again style ordered absolutely by its subject.

(3) Jonson's *Hymn to Diana* cannot be said to spring from any strong impulse of theme ; but for that very reason it is an interesting example. It is a purely classical subject, artificial, decorative. Yet its style perfectly interprets the subject. The metre of the poem has a regularity that far from causing monotony is essential to reproduce the effect of a piece of classical sculpture. The extraordinary regularity of sounds serves the same end, and seems to *freeze* the poem into a rigidity that its subject requires : the " s " is repeated thirteen times in the first verse, while the sounds of each concluding couplet aid further in the general impression of crystal clearness that the whole poem gives.

(4) Vaughan's *Vision*[1] gives a curious illustration of the point under examination. The subject is the mystic's dream of eternity ; and the rhythm of the poem falls into a series of rings or spirals, beginning from the outer rim of Eternity and circling inward through " the world and all her train."

[1] Quoted on page 73.

(5) From Shelley's poems almost any selection will display the harmony of thought and rhythm. It is in *To a Skylark*— the short flights of two lines each, breaking away into the final soaring line. The sequence of similes in this poem suggests the lark's wheeling ascent from one level to a higher and a higher. In *Ode to the West Wind* a similar use is made of similes and metaphors to express the turbulent sweep of the wind; the underlying iambic metre is frequently rushed off its feet and turned upside down by the power of the verse; the rhythm falls again suddenly into tranquil passages in perfect semblance of the periodic lulls in the onward rush of the wind (e.g. the "azure sister of the spring" passage, and the shimmering loveliness of the "pumice isle in Baiae's bay").

Charles Lamb's *The Old, Familiar Faces,* like much of Shelley's work, has a rhythm that the ear cannot miss, although the metricist is beaten by it. As the finest poetry must, it obeys the determining rhythm of its matter; and so adds a new metre to the language. The memory of lost faces is perfectly conveyed by the careful design of each line, where the second half simply echoes the first—

> "I have had playmates, I have had companions,
> In my days of childhood, in my joyful schooldays"—

suggesting the lingering desire to hover over old days.

This long line, so skilfully suspended in the middle, and the repetition of the phrase "the old, familiar faces" gives perfect expression to that mood of twilight "when you set your fancies free."

(6) Browning's best work shows yet another kind of skill in adapting verse-form to subject-matter. His imagination was strongly dramatic, and enabled him to put himself in other people's shoes in every poem. The "I" of his lyrics is by turns a cavalier, a heart-broken woman, a pleading lover, etc. More obvious examples of his apt choice of form are *Boot and Saddle,* and *How they brought the good news;* but a more delicate and more effective kind of harmony is found in the love lyrics. *You'll love me yet,* like Drayton's sonnet, swells to a passionate climax; *A Woman's Last Word* has a brief, hushed cadence which most vividly suggests the calm-after-storm of a lovers' reconcilement:

"Let's contend no more, Love,
Strive nor weep:
All be as before, Love,
——Only Sleep!"

In a Year is also brief and abrupt in rhythm, but here it is used to interpret a woman's broken soliloquy on her shattered happiness.

"Never any more,
While I live,
Need I hope to see his face
As before . . ."

A critic has recently described how Browning's claim to "dramatic" imagination is vindicated by a single comma in the poem called *In Three Days*. It opens—

"So, I shall see her in three days."

Delete the comma, and tone, gesture, significance, all vanish.

(7) Modern poetry as a whole is deeply sensitive to its matter. The remaining examples will show that whether they are working along the established lines of the Romantic style or pioneering into the style that is peculiarly "modern," the poets of to-day submit their skill to the government of their subject. No finer example of this subordination is there than Masefield's *Sea Fever*—

"I must go down to the seas again, for the call of the running tide
Is a wild call and a clear call that may not be denied;
And all I ask is a windy day, with the white clouds flying,
And the flung spray and the blown spume, and the sea-gulls crying."

Here is poetry that has the rhythm of great waters in every line; poetry that seems to have been written on the rising tide itself.

Bridges's *A Passer-By*, also a sea-piece, is equally a unity of sound and meaning, but more subtly ordered than Masefield's, written on a quiet swell.

One more example from modern poetry will show how the poet under the impulse of a certain theme builds up a rhythm that inevitably satisfies it. A. E. Housman's *Eight O'Clock* is a short lyric describing the dramatic hour of an execution. From the first line to the last, accompanying the intensity of the subject, the rhythm grows in power (subtly suspended by the use of pause) until the emotion and the rhythm rise together to the climax of the last line:

"He stood, and heard the steeple
Sprinkle the quarters on the morning town.
One, two, three, four to market-place and people
It tossed them down.

Strapped, noosed, nighing his hour,
He stood and counted them and cursed his luck;
And then the clock collected in the tower
Its strength, and struck."

Of many of the moderns, Bridges, W. B. Yeats, de la Mare, Flecker, Monro, it has been said that they write in rhythms that are new to English literature. They are new, as Shakespeare's were, because they are not measured by graduated scales; new because they are the measures that each thought or emotion designs for itself. This does not mean that metrical rhythm is forsaken by the modern poets. Rather is it moulded into new combinations and extended far beyond the iamb and the trochee to entirely new rhythms. Prosody is not defied, but enlarged, by modern poetry. Instead of "imposing" a verse-rhythm on a sense-rhythm, modern poetry seems to have the power of bending the second into the first, so that a conventional poetic diction is being replaced by common speech subtly ordered into metrical language. Rime in modern poetry is less a decoration than a very essential part of lyric construction. One can best express this change in the use of a rime by saying that a rime is used now less loudly and less frequently, and so more effectively.

April, 1885 (Bridges) is a poem full of technical perfection —of hidden rime, of alliteration and assonance, of metre— that blends completely with the poem into one music:

"Wanton with long delay the gay Spring leaping cometh;
The blackthorn stirreth now his bough on the eve of May,
All day in the sweet boxtree the bee for pleasure hummeth:
The cuckoo sends afloat his note on the air all day."

Of "free verse" that is so often frowned upon, a word in defence must be said here. Free-verse writers, far from forsaking rhythm, claim that they take very deep pains to write in the rhythm for which their subject calls. The fact that their lines are of uneven length is a very superficial difficulty. One has only to read a few lines of Job to realise that they can be written out as poetry by obeying the obvious rhythm in the lines themselves—although those lines will have neither rime nor regularity. If the student reads this extract from

D. H. Lawrence's *Craving for Spring* he will at least appreciate that the lines are not arranged in an *arbitrary* manner, but that they attempt to give the proper importance to the various parts of the image used :

" Oh, yes, the gush of Spring is strong enough
To toss the globe of earth like a ball on a water-jet
Dancing sportfully ;
As you see a tiny celluloid ball tossing on a spiral of water
For men to shoot at, penny-a-time, in a booth at a fair."

A more accomplished example of poetry that is " free " so far as it does not adopt regular lines (for reasons that anyone who reads it may see at once), is Harold Monro's beautiful *Children of Love.*

Jesus, the " holy boy," meets Cupid in the fields, " Among the olives shining green."

" The holy boy
Gazed with those sad blue eyes that all men know.
Impudent Cupid stood
Panting, holding an arrow and pointing his bow.

(Will you not play ?
Jesus, run to him, run to him, swift for our joy.
Is he not holy, like you ?
Are you afraid of his arrows, O beautiful dreaming boy ?)

And now they stand
Watching one another with timid gaze ;
Youth has met youth in the wood,
But holiness will not change its melancholy ways.

Cupid at last
Draws his bow and softly lets fly a dart.
Smile for a moment, sad world !—
It has grazed the white skin and drawn blood from the sorrowful heart.

Now, for delight,
Cupid tosses his locks and goes wantonly near ;
But the child that was born to the cross
Has let fall on his cheek for the sadness of life, a compassionate tear.

Marvellous dream !
Cupid has offered his arrows for Jesus to try ;
He has offered his bow for the game.
But Jesus went weeping away, and left him there wondering why."

The student should, from any anthology of modern verse, test the following list of its main characteristics.

(1) Its extraordinary variety of rhythm, corresponding to a range of poetic interest that is wider than English literature has known for at least three centuries.

(2) Its use of familiar devices such as rime, assonance.

(3) Its wider toleration of diction and images that heretofore have not been admitted to poetry.

(4) Its practice, side by side with this modernisation, of a tradition and a style that are as readily illustrated in Bridges or de la Mare as in Sidney or Coleridge.

The balance between tradition and innovation which modern poetry strikes will, after such an examination, be apparent.

A lyric is essentially a short poem; but there must be occasions when its compelling motive calls for a more sustained expression, or for more variation of treatment than the short poem can allow. There are two more lengthy lyric forms that make this possible: Ode and Elegy. The lyric expresses spontaneously a mood. But that mood may easily enough grow into a theme, to be treated at length; such treatment is the function of the ode or of the elegy.

The grief of mourning a poet may transmute into a lyric; but such a sorrow is evidently not one that is to be purged by such momentary expression. Over it the poet is more inclined to linger and to meditate, to recall happy hours, to cry out against Fate. The first emotion, then, induces a sustained mood of reflection, frequently broken perhaps by sheer lyric moments when that first emotion breaks through meditation into a brief and poignant lament for some quality or some action of the dead friend's life that is suddenly remembered. Shelley's *Adonais* is of this nature. Such emotions as grief for a personal loss, anger against his friend's detractors, time after time break through the mythological imagery that Shelley chose to bear the larger theme. Milton's *Lycidas*, and Tennyson's *In Memoriam*, have the same construction: one deep emotion, constantly re-surging through lines that are expressing some philosophy or meditation or prophecy. Gray's *Elegy* has the other qualities of elegy without its force of personal lament.

The ode is the elegy without its particularisation of subject. It does not throw off its mood into one spontaneous outburst, but reflects upon it, rising at times into lyric passages and falling away again into meditation. It is invariably inspired

by a great theme, The Nativity (Milton), Duty (Wordsworth), Unattainable Beauty (Keats's *Nightingale*), Immortality (Tennyson's *In Memoriam*), Music (Bridges).

Taking its name from a Greek word that meant a song, the Ode in English fell into the error of modelling its matter upon an archæological form that was written specifically for musical accompaniment. Cowley and Dryden wrote odes of this kind, that were based on the method of Pindar, in so far as they claimed to wed words and music within their lines : the result, as in Dryden's two odes on music, is a very conscious devising of irregularities both of rime and of rhythm that does not convince. When the example of Pindar was neglected and matter freed from "customary suits," Shelley and Keats made the ode one of the most elastic of lyric poems ; and in the present day Robert Bridges in his *Ode to Music* has achieved a variety of rhythms that perfectly interpret the several movements of a symphony.

CHAPTER VI

THE DRAMA

I

THE game of make-believe is a deep-rooted human instinct. This is to be seen most easily in a child's games; but, if adults would tell the truth about themselves, it could be shown that the game continues into the maturest years. In this make-believe, words come last. Long before anything but the roughest dialogue appears, the other constituents of drama are there; the dressing up in "character," the crude sketching of a plot or story.

This human love of make-believe was pressed into service by the English priesthood of the 13th century who were faced with the problem of interesting illiterate congregations in Latin services. Sections of Bible history were given at first in pantomime, by priests who dressed up as scriptural personages and by suitable actions managed to convey the gist of a Bible story to their audience. Here already are two of the elements of the drama, action and story. And it was not long before a third was added, when the story was no longer given in dumb-show, but in Latin or English words. There is significance in the fact that the drama in England began by fulfilling a utilitarian purpose, inasmuch as it gives further point to the contention that all art forms are an expression of human impulses and a satisfaction of human wants.

These early plays are called Miracle Plays; and their further development was once more due to the demands of the people. Their popularity brought them from the Church, where they were limited because of space, and, perhaps, of propriety, to the market-place; and out of the hands of the clergy into those of the mediæval organisations of craftsmen, the Guilds. So the drama became communal in a very complete sense, performed by the people for the people on public holidays.

The whole Bible story of the Fall and Redemption of Man was contained in the series of plays; and each Guild in the various towns of England undertook the performance of a play that appealed most to its members. There exist four collections or "cycles" of these plays, the York, Towneley, Coventry, and Chester collections. The expenses of production at these open-air performances were borne by the respective Guilds, each of whom erected and maintained its box-like "pageant," or plank-stage on wheels, and provided such properties as it could afford.

The composition of the Miracles provides further evidence that they were designed to be popular; for they ministered not only to the religious feeling, but also to the human love of farce and fooling. So the play of Noah supplied not only Bible history, but also such broad comedy as violent quarrels between Noah and his headstrong wife who hates the idea of being cut off in a dim, lonely Ark from shopping and gossiping. In *The Shepherd's Play* of the Towneley cycle the watchers by night sit and complain of the weather, wages, and women; and the subsequent rough and tumble of the play elbows out the story almost entirely—a certain indication that the ready-made plot is already giving way to home-made drama.

This is further shown in the evolution from the Miracle of the Morality Play and the Interlude. The style of the Morality is allegorical, one that was much esteemed during the 14th and 15th centuries. The characters in the play are abstract vices and virtues, such as Mundus (or Worldliness), Justice, Freewill, or the Seven Deadly Sins; and the aim of the plays is wholly "improving," although a comedy element is still permitted, provided by that begetter of the Shakespearean clown, the Vice, or the mischief maker, the practical joker whose antics sugar the pill of the Morality. Although possessing many of the crudities of the Miracle Plays some of the Moralities show distinct power and promise, as in the grave beauty of *Everyman*, the drama of the human soul on the threshold of Death.

The other development of the Miracle, the Interlude, is by some authorities taken to be the Morality shorn of its soberest features; but, as we have seen, there was no exclusion of farce from the Morality. On the whole it may be considered as a piece without any obvious religious intention, and often with a cynical flavour, as in Heywood's *The Four P.P.*, where

a Palmer wins a prize for the best lie over the Pardoner, Pothecary, and Pedlar, by saying that never has he seen or heard of a woman who lost her temper.

Besides the Interlude there was another current form of entertainment which later became an ingredient of the Comedy—the Masque. This seems to have begun as a kind of fancy-dress carnival of the kind that angered Shylock when he heard that such a procession of "Christian fools with varnished faces" was about to make merry in the Venetian streets. It became the recognised form of amateur theatricals at Elizabethan and Stuart Courts: a compound of music, dancing, and spectacle, frequently based on a myth or a fairy-tale, and performed by the nobility. In Shakespeare's plays both the Interlude and the Masque are employed, e.g. the "tedious brief scene" of Pyramus and Thisbe played by the Athenian workmen to help

> "Wear away this long age of three hours
> Between our after supper and our bedtime."

II

By the middle of the 16th century there had been time for this mass of experiment and 'prentice work to resolve itself into something more ambitious. The native interest in drama, evidenced by the work of a couple of centuries, was now brought into contact with the challenge and inspiration of the Revival of Learning. The wealth of classical drama began to be available in England, where, however, the performances that were given by the Universities were not of the master-models of Greek drama, but of such comparatively second-rate Roman imitations as the tragedies of Seneca.

The first English attempt on Senecan lines is a poor enough play, where all native possibilities, except the retention of dumb-show (which gives a synopsis of each act), are smothered by the new-found form and method. The play, written by Norton and Sackville, and performed before the Queen in 1561, follows Seneca in its five solid acts, in the action "off stage," and the chorus that closes each act. But this depressing novelty has one welcome feature. It is the first English play in blank verse, an innovation first practised in English poetry a few years earlier by the Earl of Surrey who had discovered it in Italy. Naturally the blank verse of *Gorboduc*

has none of the flexibility that Shakespeare and Milton gave it later ; run-on lines are absent, the sense is generally bound within the confines of a line or two, producing a cramped utterance.

The first regular English comedy was written by a Headmaster of Eton to take the place of the usual Latin-play entertainment. Here again the influence of Latin models is seen : in the division of the play into five acts with their subsidiary scenes, in the unity of time (twenty-four hours covers the whole action), and in the unchanging scene. There is in *Ralph Roister Doister* a contact with contemporary life (lacking in the classical tragedy of the same period) that indicates already an independence of anything but the *form* of the Latin model, and that promises a natural, and therefore a national comedy ; as though the native comedy genius of England, while willing to go to school, was yet determined not to become scholastic. The characters of the play are live reproductions of 16th-century London. *Gorboduc* and *Ralph Roister Doister* were the first of a series of plays written in the interval before the appearance of Shakespeare. Briefly the work of his forerunners may be summarised thus :

There was first the attempt to set English drama closely along classical lines, since many thought that Latin drama had set patterns that could not be bettered. Secondly, there were those who found the classical mode too rigid for the purposes of free native drama. These people very rightly realised that there was a wealth of promise in the Morality and the Interlude ; and that the advancement of drama was best to be gained by the strengthening and amending of this native genius—not refusing, however, to accept any suggestions from the classics that would be useful under English conditions. The names of this band of pioneers were Lyly, Peele, Greene, Marlowe, Kyd.

Since the purpose here is to show the trend and development towards Shakespeare, the features that were to be most powerfully sustained by him should be picked out from the work of his precursors. Two of these display individually those two attainments that made Shakespeare of surpassing greatness. Lyly wrote plays in verse and prose that have no dramatic interest, but he wrote in language that, if possibly over-decorated, yet shows an ease and nimbleness that are a new accomplishment in the drama. The exaggerations natural

to the practice of a new skill are plentiful enough in Lyly; but it is to be noted that from him Shakespeare must have learned the tricks of punning and literary tumbling that make the fool depend less and less on his slapstick and more on his brain.[1]

Of this band of playwrights the one whose contribution was richest and most vital was Christopher Marlowe. For many reasons is he the principal figure in the development of the drama up to his own time. In the first place, there is no mistaking his earnestness. His plays are not the work of an experimenter, but of a prophet—of one convinced that he knows how to deliver his message. His subjects are of the nature and sweep of epic, mighty in themselves, Tamburlaine the Great with his passion for world-dominion, Dr. Faustus selling his soul for earthly joys, the Jew of Malta desiring the whole world's wealth. Here is the promise of such universal figures as Hamlet, Macbeth, Shylock, Brutus, and Lear, of men fallen from great prosperity to deep misery, figures whose exits are as pitiful as their entrances were magnificent. There is a fragment from *Tamburlaine* that illustrates Marlowe's power to present a scene so powerfully as to make it overwhelming in its appeal. Zenocrate, the Emperor's wife, is lying dead. Tamburlaine, crazy with grief, cries out against Heaven and Hell "for taking hence my fair Zenocrate." His sober friend, Theridamas, no less overcome, gives wise counsel:

> "Ah, good, my lord, be patient. She is dead
> And all this raging cannot make her live.
> If words might serve, our voice hath rent the air,
> If tears, our eyes have watered all the earth,
> If grief, our murdered hearts have strained forth blood.
> Nothing prevails, for she is dead, my lord."

TAMBURLAINE:

> "'For she is dead!' Thy words do pierce my soul!
> Ah, sweet Theridamas! say so no more;
> Though she be dead yet let me think she lives
> And feed my mind that dies for want of her.
> (*looking at the body*) Where'er her soul be, *thou* shalt stay with me,
> Embalmed with cassia, ambergris, and myrrh,
> Not lapt in lead, but in a sheet of gold,
> And till I die thou shalt not be interred.
> Then in a tomb as rich as Mausolus'
> We both will rest and have one epitaph

[1] See *Love's Labour's Lost.*

Writ in as many several languages
As I have conquered kingdoms with my sword.
This cursed town will I consume with fire,
Because this place bereaved me of my love:
The houses burnt will look as if they mourned;
And here will I set up her statua,
And march about it with my mourning camp
Drooping and pining for Zenocrate."

On the whole, the criticism of Marlowe on the ground that his persons are not sufficiently individual may be justified; but in this passage there is powerful enough characterisation. Tamburlaine in this scene is shown ranging from the passion of the megalomaniac to the helpless, pitiful despair of a bereaved man, and his fury of vengeance against "this cursed town," no sooner uttered, gives way again to the simplicity of grief, to the beautiful dying fall of that last line, "Drooping and pining for Zenocrate." The contrast of the King's turbulent spirit with the quiet common sense of Theridamas is another achievement of characterisation that should not be overlooked.

His contribution to the form of the drama was as great as the life he gave to its substance. Blank verse he showed to be the greatest vehicle for dramatic poetry. He inherited the unyielding line of *Gorboduc*, where sense was confined within a line or two, and from it he coaxed the run-on lines that, far from cramping expression, give it a rhythm that bears it triumphantly along.

While Shakespeare owes a wealth of example to Marlowe, there were also mistakes that he avoided. The excessive passion of all Marlowe's creations is away from the reality that Shakespeare so carefully conveyed. The revelation of the tenderness of life, its happiness, its variety—these, unknown in Marlowe, are an important part of the sum of Shakespeare's achievement.

III

A brief account of the culmination of the dramatic pioneering of three centuries in the work of Shakespeare will bring us to a point where it will be possible to break off the history in favour of an inquiry into the nature and method of drama as exemplified in the set pattern of Shakespeare.

Of the master-craftsman of the English drama, no more will be said here than is essential to a sketch of his work.

There are two striking illustrations of the supremacy of Shakespeare in English drama. The first is the persistent attempt to assign his work to other writers ; an attempt that seems to spring wholly from incredulity. Because Shakespeare's achievement is wholly unparalleled, it is unbelievable. The sum of the plays is bigger than any individual's capacities. And from these convictions critics and questioners have, for example, concluded that the work was done by a select committee of dramatists under the chairmanship of Francis Bacon.

Secondly, the quality of the plays, in bulk, has never been challenged. Their writer has a security allowed to no other writer. Spenser, Milton, Keats, Wordsworth, Tennyson, all have their seasons of eclipse and disparagement. Shakespeare is safe even with the moderns—whose characteristic is assumed to be an exaggeration of their own century's achievement and a patronage of all that preceding ages have written.

From the first days of his apprenticeship, Shakespeare wrote for the stage. Any story of comedy, history, or tragedy which he could come across provided subject-matter that could be moulded to suit the requirements of the theatre. Accuracy of historical or geographical or, indeed, of any other detail, mattered little : there was a theatre-going audience that had to be pacified quickly. "Are you in sentimental mood ? "—then *Two Gentlemen of Verona* is ready for performance. " If patriotic sentiment is wanted," there is one of the history plays ready for the groundlings, with all the pageantry of Plantagenet victories across the Channel ; a tale of events subtly mixed with the lives of common folk in relation to those events. When a popular success was scored, as with Falstaff, the playwright saw to it that another play was soon written round the same figure. The plays are full of indications that Shakespeare was writing with his eye on current demand. As his position grows securer, as his own tragic life deepens and darkens, both the necessity and the desire to please public tastes diminish ; so that by the end he is writing less for the age than for posterity. And as The Age appreciated this latter work, so does Posterity find full satisfaction in what was written for Elizabethans. That power to satisfy all ages and all conditions of men is one of the criteria of greatness.

A chronological classification of the plays enables us to

follow Shakespeare's developing power in the several branches of his craft.

1. In his first period, 1588–93, apart from touching up old plays, he produced mainly comedies: *Love's Labour's Lost, Comedy of Errors, A Midsummer Night's Dream;* and one tragedy, *Romeo and Juliet.*
2. From 1594–1600 he wrote comedies of the broadest vein, such as *The Taming of the Shrew,* and *The Merry Wives of Windsor;* comedies of romance—*As You Like It*—and a series of histories—*Richard II, Henry IV,* and *Henry V;* and the two tragi-comedies, *The Merchant of Venice,* and *Twelfth Night,* with Shylock and Malvolio, the two tragic comedians.
3. The third period from 1601–8 contains the best of his work, and the bitterest: the succession of tragedies proceeding through *Julius Cæsar, Hamlet,* and *Othello* to *Lear* and *Macbeth.*
4. The last period, 1608–12, contains *Antony* and *Coriolanus,* in the vein of the third period, and the two last romances, *The Winter's Tale,* and *The Tempest.*

There is a significance not to be overlooked in Shakespeare's casual choice of subject-matter. In a world where the elements of comedy or tragedy are always at hand there is no need to devise what seems to be an original plot. Of all things, subject-matter, plot, is least difficult for the dramatist to create: a tale of life in any of its few variations is all that is needed. It is the handling of the tale that makes it either transient or imperishable.

The structure of the plays often reveals two important facts about Shakespeare's work:

(*a*) They are written for a particular kind of stage.
(*b*) They were sometimes written in a hurry.

(*a*) The Elizabethan stage, like all stages, was built to suit the demands of the audience. A development of the old inn-yard platform-stage, it was built to meet the needs of an audience who went to see a play and not to see each other. In the 17th century (as in the 20th) the Theatre was a social institution; but with a difference. To-day the social power of the theatre tends to rely on inessentials, such as the gather-

ing of eminent playgoers in the vestibule or stalls ; the theatre too often is a spectacle provided not by the stage but by the audience. In Elizabethan times the power of the theatre lay rather in the gathering of the community to see a play. Fashion was there, indisputably, sometimes on stools on the stage itself ; but it was intensely interested in the play. It was impatient of delays, and demanded action without intervals until the climax of the play was reached. It was an audience, however, that was ready to surrender its love of action to the pleasure of hearing fine poetry well spoken.

(*b*) Many evidences of haste are to be found in the structure of the plays. The casket scenes in *The Merchant of Venice* cut against Shakespeare's clear intention at the start that Bassanio shall win Portia, and seem to have been included for the purpose of extending the play to its customary length. Shakespeare often seems caught in two minds as to the lines on which the play shall develop ; as though he were being pressed for time in filling an urgent demand from the theatre managers.

The early comedies are constructed with the care of one who has just passed from apprenticeship and who is modelling his work on conventional lines. Yet so early a play as *A Midsummer Night's Dream* shows that he is gathering force and expressing an individuality ; for here he builds up on the foundation provided by scenes from Court life a play of fantasy and buffoonery that is new to the English stage. Characterisation is rarely attempted except when observation and wit can combine to create Bully Bottom. The Court figures are indefinite and colourless : they are neatly paired and fall into a general architectural plan.

Theseus — Hippolyta
Hermia — Lysander Helena — Demetrius
Oberon — Titania.

Care is given to the balance of characters : the scenes are regularly divided between courtiers, fairies, and artisans : all is subordinated to the desire to give harmonious variety to the new dramatist's audience. So far Shakespeare is taking no risks.

In the work of the second period, Shakespeare shows a great access of skill in shaping the plot and the characters. In *Twelfth Night* he gives full sway to the happy blend of humour

and romance that had already been tried in the earlier comedies. A plot is built up of three patterns of love: Viola (in disguise as a page, Cesario) loves her master, the Duke, a real human love: Olivia loves "Cesario," a whimsical mischance: Malvolio loves Olivia, a comic catastrophe, not without a subtle hint of tragedy. The handling of these parallel loves is a test of the dramatist's command over his story; and the final unravelling of the strands is done with certainty and ease. In this play, too, the characters are strongly outlined: a merry rascal like Sir Toby distinguished from his catspaw Sir Andrew; a mischievous girl like Maria; a sentimental one like Olivia; a pitifully conceited "upper servant" like Malvolio.

In the great tragedies these powers of structure and character are at the full. *Julius Cæsar* is strongly built: Tyranny—Revolution—Counter-Revolution. *Macbeth* is equally firm in construction: the seed-sowing of the witches—the hint of indecision in Macbeth—the sway of Lady Macbeth—the climax of Duncan's death—the impetus given by the horror of that deed to a higher climax still—the death of Macbeth in the full fury of action. Lear, doomed to tragedy from the first lines of the play—the faint, unfulfilled promise of happiness when he is rescued by the French army—and the subsequent deeper intensity of his pitiful end. In all the tragedies is this same sureness of handling, the growing force of tragedy doubly redoubled in each development of the play.

Clearly a powerful structure depends on powerful figures on whom a play can *march* to its ends. If tragedy is the clash of men and their purposes, those men must live. The ability to manage these crises is shown in the quarrel scene between Brutus and Cassius, in the pitting against each other of two clearly marked contrasting natures in a struggle that has a sudden dramatic collapse: "Portia is dead." The weakness of greatness is the paradox that fascinates Shakespeare in all the tragedies.

In many other ways the work of this period shows Shakespeare's mastery of technique—a technique that at all points was built on the actual requirements of a popular theatre. Time and again he uses suspense to heighten the impending revelation, as in the scenes immediately before Cæsar's murder and Duncan's murder. The hint of an approaching catastrophe is early given to the audience, and thereafter the hint

is further strengthened by a sinister soliloquy or by a description of some strange phenomenon in the heavens. His use of "relief" is just as obviously dictated by consideration for an audience that cannot safely be harrowed beyond a given point. Only in the later plays, such as *Lear*, when the author is himself a tragic figure and successful enough to be less anxious to please, does Shakespeare dispense with the antidote of relief. His manipulation of ghosts is one more illustration of his skill as a stage deviser. On every occasion the Ghost appears at the psychologically ripe moment—and, more important still, Shakespeare is never unwise enough to leave the Ghost on the stage too long. It is a passing terror, a momentary invasion from the spirit world.

The verse and language of the plays reveal a growing power from first to last. Beginning with the rather restrained blank verse of *Love's Labour's Lost* and *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, the same poet achieves the free play of the blank verse of *Hamlet* and *Antony*. The defects of the beginner—the fall into rhyme and assonance, the prevalence of end-stopt lines—are freely present in the two plays first mentioned. But at the end such a command of versification has been won as can sustain the grandeur of Cleopatra's death scene:

> "Give me my robe, put on my crown; I have
> Immortal longings on me; now no more
> The juice of Egypt's grape shall moist this lip.
> Yare, yare, good Iras, quick. Methinks I hear
> Antony call; I see him rouse himself
> To praise my noble act; I hear him mock
> The luck of Cæsar, which the gods give men
> To excuse their after wrath: husband, I come."

Of the excellence of language from first to last the plays themselves must speak. But here we may note a part of the dramatist's work that is nowadays done by scene-painter or electrician. The plays are full of such descriptive passages as can nullify the achievements of decorator and mechanic. There is the loveliness of the lines in *The Merchant of Venice:*

> "look how the floor of heaven
> Is thick inlaid with patines of bright gold. . . ."

Or

> "The morn in russet mantle clad
> Walks o'er the dew of yon high eastern hill."

There is the picture of the outer walls of Macbeth's castle (and

surely of the interior of an Elizabethan theatre!) where the "temple-haunting martlet" builds in the crevices.

In an age where poetry is rarely spoken on the stage we may be inclined to forget that blank verse was written to be spoken, and that in the Elizabethan plays it is as important a part of the play as the actual construction. It could be used, as in so many passages of *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, as sheer sound; it could be written in different tempo to contrast the volcanic temperament of Cassius with the slow dignity of Brutus. Substitution of blank verse by prose passages or by lyric, the speed of its utterance, the varying use of pause or repetition, are all used definitely to help in the fixing of some character or of some scene (e.g. the many styles of speech used in the broadly different persons and scenes in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*).

IV

There are adequate reasons why, at this point, the nature of drama may best be examined. First, because Shakespeare provides the best illustrations of its essentials; secondly, because since his day certain fundamental changes have occurred which have brought drastic changes to English drama. In this chapter, the growth from crude experiment to a sublime stature has been outlined. Here then we may stop to analyse that finished form; afterwards noting the subsequent variations as far as the present day.

At the beginning of this chapter it was pointed out that the beginnings of drama lie in the impulse to act, to play a part. So long as this impulse is expressed only through action, however, as in the dumb shows of the mystery plays, drama has not emerged. The story told in gesture is but a step. When the story is told not only in action but in words, drama has begun.

The story itself is not a contribution to the play: it is like the cloth the weaver uses, or the mason's stone—so much material, more or less promising. If less promising, the craftsman can do wonders with it; if more so, the success of the play does not owe it anything.

The first feature of the drama is the building up of the plot, the devising of *the clash of purposes* which is the essential of drama. In this connection certain principles were long ago laid down by the Greeks; some of which remain essential,

others of which were only temporarily necessary. The one that remains declared that a play must possess unity of action. That is, all must be subordinated to the initial purpose of the play. Many actions may take place—but all must bear upon the proposed end. Thus from a long story of the life of Macbeth, the dramatist builds up a series of actions which will proceed from his initial intention of revealing Macbeth as the tool of ambition. Without this linking of action to action there may be story, but not drama.

The other ancient unities, of time and place, were, rightly, disregarded for practical reasons. The insistence of the Elizabethan audiences was for action, and a variety of action, too. Their stage, with its three compartments, was built for this, enabling them to whisk the action away from a forest to a court, or from Rome to Alexandria (without, it must be realised, destroying unity of action, for the march of Antouy to his doom never swerves throughout the play). The third unity, of time, was ignored by Shakespeare (save in the three-hour movement of *The Tempest*).

Beginning with his fixed purpose, indicated briefly at the outset, the playwright has to set the action in motion. So, in the first few lines of *Lear*, the theme is made clear, leaving full scope for the unfolding of the action; and in *Twelfth Night* the exposition is soon laid down—Viola's romantic adventure in a Court where love is the only pastime. From that exposition the action must "grow to a point," neither too quickly nor too slowly. Particularly in the approach to his climax does the dramatist reveal his skill. He may employ devices such as surprise, but he must not fall into improbability. His climax must not strain credulity or he loses the confidence of his audience, as Shakespeare once does when he sets Antonio free from a terrible end by a childish quibble of law. Here, however, the surprise of the action compensates, for it is accompanied by the sudden overwhelming of Shylock. Ingenuity is commendable, necessary, in the design of the climax. But a step beyond, it forfeits the dramatist's credit, and kills the illusion of the play.

The theme of the play is often universalised by the tracing of sub-plots parallel to the main plot—" much as a shadow upon the wall copies one's body in the firelight. We think of *Lear* less as the history of one man and his sorrow than as the history of a whole evil time. Lear's shadow is in Gloster,

who also has ungrateful children, and the mind goes on imagining other shadows, shadows beyond shadows, till it has pictured the world."[1]

The persons of the play *carry* the action; and anything about them that hints of their unfitness for the burden is to be avoided. They must do what the action suggests they would do in life, they must express thoughts that would not be unexpected from them. They should be neither more nor less than the situation demands. Shakespeare's great figures are truly drawn in this respect. They are, first of all, human: Cæsar deaf in one ear, yet a mighty general; they are consistent; their exits and their entrances are timed to the moment, so that no man lingers to hamper the action; they are each planned on the scale the action requires; so that whether they are major or minor they govern the action each in the necessary degree.

Part of Shakespeare's power here is derived from his skill in presenting his characters. Macbeth, seen in the threatening weather of a blasted heath. Falstaff, bemused with sack, is first heard asking, "Now, Hal, what time of day is it, lad?" The first words spoken by Shylock are "in character": "Three thousand ducats; well?" So are those of the love-stricken Duke in *Twelfth Night*, "If music be the food of love, play on."

These essentials hold for tragedy or for comedy, for the difference between them is not in the first principle (which demands a crossing of purposes as the essential for drama), but in the development of the clash. If it proceeds along serious, inevitably unhappy lines, the end is tragedy; if it proceeds lightly, if the confusion gives no pain, but only a temporary misunderstanding, the end is comedy.

Shakespeare and the Elizabethans kept the earliest notions of tragedy: the catastrophic downfall of a great figure, caused by some prominent constituent in his character such as ambition, over-credulousness, passion, greed. In Elizabethan comedy there is more independence of classical models, and a closer adherence to the native comic spirit. Shakespeare's comedies cover so wide a space of experiment that it is difficult to discover in them some theory of comedy that might be called Shakespearean. There is the romance—almost a masque—of *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, there are the farces,

[1] W. B. Yeats: *Essays.*

The Taming of the Shrew, and the *Comedy of Errors*, the romantic comedy *Twelfth Night*, and *The Merchant of Venice*, both with more than a hint of tragedy in them, for both Malvolio and Shylock are overthrown to a bitter end. Of all these, however, the conclusion may be that there is nothing here for tears, no stirring up in the spectator's mind of pity or of fear. Beyond that, if the plays will not yield a definition of Shakespearean comedy, it may be for the obvious reason that Shakespeare had no definition.

Although the Elizabethans owed much to classical models they soon learned to avoid too close an imitation. Whatever principles of drama hold good, a national drama must mould itself for its own time and for its own people. Some few examples will show the sound sense which guided the Elizabethans in this matter and which gave their age a drama that was not only literary but also popular.

One of the fundamental departures from the Greek tragedy was the handling of the catastrophe. This was not left to be reported by the Messenger, but carried out on the stage itself and arranged so as to fall as near as possible to the end of the play: e.g. the harvest of sudden deaths at the end of *Hamlet* or the dramatic suicides in the closing scenes of *Julius Cæsar*. There are obvious advantages over the Greek tragedy in this method, from the point of view of the spectator as well as from that of the playwright who is aiming at a powerful piling-up of effect. After the great moment there is nothing left to do but to make the last gesture of sorrow: "Go, bid the soldiers shoot."

Or

> "The oldest hath borne most; we that are young
> Shall never see so much, nor live so long."

Or

> "This was the noblest Roman of them all."

This sense of economy in achieving a dramatic "curtain" is one of the most impressive characteristics of the Elizabethan drama; nor is the innovation discounted if it may have been largely necessitated by the structure of the curtainless stage from which it was impossible to remove the dead before the play was over. From beginning to end there was presumably no interval in the play, and therefore no opportunity for clearing off bodies—except by the unthinkable sacrifice of destroying the illusion of the play.

A second departure from the classical canon was the Elizabethan resort to comic relief in tragedy, an innovation that is justifiable on humane grounds as well as dramatic. Shakespeare and his contemporaries wrote not for publication but for performance, and may therefore be credited with knowing the needs of their audience. Any philosophical interpretation of such scenes as the Grave-diggers' or the Porter's (in *Macbeth*) seems to ignore Shakespeare's eagerness to please his audiences. There may be an inner meaning to the solemn nonsense about the solubility of a tanner's skin—" a tanner will last some seven year "—but at all events an Elizabethan audience found in it the relief of irresponsible guffawing. In later English drama, this same device has been practised, the easing-up of an intolerably exhausting development so that the audience may relax before the final ascent.

To-day, more good plays are written to be printed than to be acted. In Shakespeare's day the play was written for the stage. The playwright wrote not in the study but in the theatre. Once that truth is fully realised many peculiarities of the plays will be made plain, and they will be understood for what they are—a body of drama written for performance in a public place for a critical and discerning audience. The only parallel in English history to such an age is the repertory theatre that is struggling for life in two or three English theatres to-day.

Recently it has been suggested that the descriptive passages in Shakespeare's plays are intended to serve the purpose of the songs in the classical Chorus, to introduce relief by transferring the mind of the audience temporarily from the tragedy. Whether Shakespeare had that purpose in mind or not cannot be known ; but it may be confidently surmised that part of his intention was to " paint in " broad descriptive effects at convenient moments in the play. Thus the vivid picture of Dover Cliffs presented at a comparatively quiet point in *Lear*, or the equally famous picture of " the floor of heaven . . . thick inlaid with patines of bright gold," has no function of relief. Although Shakespeare left the scenes mostly to his audience's imagination, yet he often felt it necessary to sketch parts of it for them.

Finally, whether as a student or as a playwright working for a stage production of some three hours' duration, Shakespeare employed another of the fundamentals of Greek drama

—the use of the Messenger. Not, however, as a leading character, but as the narrator of events that could not be fitted into the play itself. Clearly the scene where Cæsar thrice refuses the crown before an admiring audience would have made a telling effect on the stage ; it was left to be told by Casca. Sometimes the messenger narrates a scene in another place and by so doing enables the play to overcome a difficult situation, e.g. Queen Gertrude's rather circumstantial account of Ophelia's death, rich in poetry as it is threadbare in credibility.

The principles of dramatic structure here outlined were followed by Shakespeare, who from them built up a drama that depicted real human beings of many ranks and conditions under the stress of fortune. His plays, ranging the world, pictured the reactions that Man makes to varying kinds of circumstance. After him the English drama passes through lean times, relieved by very occasional happy moments.

V

Ben Jonson was a contemporary as well as an admirer of Shakespeare, who wrote tragedies and masques, but whose fame rests on the comedies in which he carried through a single-handed campaign against Shakespearean practice in the dramatic art.

He was first of all directly opposed to the current treatment of the subject-matter of comedy, a treatment to which the epithet " romantic " is applied for sake of a better. Romantic comedy avoided direct contact with the existing order of things—although indirectly it often met them—and looked into the ages that had already gone. It displayed a greater interest in the things that every generation seems to think it has lost—courtly love and romanticism generally. It would stage a play in Fairyland or Illyria rather than in London, and would fill the play with people whom it liked to think were figures of a bygone age, even if they persisted in revealing current habits. Ben Jonson objected to this treatment of subject-matter. The world about him was to be treated as it was in the present—not pushed back into the past and seen through a rose-coloured telescope. The drama was to portray the modes of people of the 17th-century London. It was, to use another term of convenience, to be *realistic*.

Nor was he prepared to leave an audience to make what it

liked out of a play, as Shakespeare left *Twelfth Night* or *The Tempest*. It was to be made clear that the play had a very definite purpose—not to picture men and their manners, but to caricature them. The result, as of all caricature, was to reveal the weaknesses of people and so possibly to correct them.[1]

This dissatisfaction with the theatre because it did not teach lessons was accompanied by a distrust of Shakespearean methods of technique. He saw dangers in a drama where every playwright made his innovations and generally disregarded classical method.

He also established a fixed kind of characterisation that would enable him to carry out his didactic purpose. Every man has his "humour" or governing quality, avarice, love of quietness, etc., and this feature (like the beaked nose and bald head so loved by the cartoonist) is taken as the man himself, and treated with appropriate ridicule. Such a method gives a clearness of outline to characters, but only at the expense of a loss of humanity that any such exaggeration must cause; so that Jonson's studies in contemporary life have for us actually less reality than a romantic figure like Prospero or Falstaff. Although he is too persistent a cartoonist to make a real man, the figures he does make are striking enough, as in *Volpone*, where in their eagerness to inherit Volpone's mythical fortune the several characters reveal their amazing natures.

His failure is that of every preaching dramatist, a kind of under-estimating of the audience; an insistence that the play's purpose be made clear. And to gain the moral end there is the adoption of an unfair method, a heavy handicapping of less worthy characters, sending them on the stage with jeers and in comic costume, to be derided from their first appearance.

Of the other playwrights of the time, Chapman, Dekker, Beaumont and Fletcher, Massinger, Middleton, and Webster, nothing will be said here, since in one way or another they were followers of the Elizabethan tradition.

When at the Restoration the theatres were freed from the Puritan ban, they produced plays that seem ample justification for the Puritan suppression. Many reasons for the decline of the drama have been offered—the reckless reaction from

[1] Cp. the modern "problem" play.

Puritanism, the Court monopoly of drama to the exclusion of anything like the Elizabethan popular audiences, the transplanting of French models, Racine, Molière, and Corneille. Of these the second seems most attractive. The Elizabethan drama had been a manifestation of public taste, a drama made to satisfy the current passion for a good play. After the Restoration it lost its democratic government and became the slave of Court tyranny and therefore the pandar to a degenerate taste.

Through this welter of poor plays, however, a tendency is discernible to what is called the Comedy of Manners. Jonson's Comedy of Humours foreshadows it: a comedy that deals with "types" rather than with people. Its moral values were those of the Court, where pleasure was the only consideration and where virtue was provocative of a sneer or an unpleasant jest. The method of the Restoration dramatists was later applied, by Goldsmith and Sheridan, to the depiction of less repulsive manners. Meanwhile, tragedy had suffered a rapid eclipse. Shakespeare's plays had occasionally been played in mutilated form; but apart from this there had been only luckless imitations of classical models, such as Thomson's *Sophonisba* and Johnson's *Irene*.

Sheridan was as much a courtier as any Restoration playwright, and an apprentice politician as well. In portraying the manners of his circle, he was able to find comedy without obscenity, to raise a laugh not at the virtuous man but at the hypocrite. Sheridan's society, like Congreve's, was that roughly described as "the governing classes"; and although it no doubt possessed many of the habitual vices, it seems to have cleansed itself sufficiently to endure the "mirror held up to nature." This is Sheridan's chief importance, for as a dramatist he made no new departures. His method is Congreve's, taking Society as he found it and staging scenes from it with considerable sense of situation, e.g. the Screen scene in *The School for Scandal*. Of characterisation there are few subtleties—rather a broad delineation of the honest types and the hypocritical, each person being labelled with a particular "humour" in the Jonsonian tradition. This kinship he has with Shakespeare—that his work was designed to please current taste, and that his types were as real to the 18th century as Shakespeare's to the early 17th. In other ways Sheridan's work is typical of his time: it is easy, polished,

and graceful, rarely touching upon the deeper issues of human life, but not sparing the superficialities and the shams of his day, as when in *The Critic* he reveals a power to use Comedy as a lash for the literary humbugs of the town. The preoccupations of the writers of the 19th century were with other forms of literature than the dramatic, and the space here given to 19th-century drama represents its importance in English literature. But the 20th century has seen a recrudescence of drama which bears upon it many new marks.

VI

The Dramatic Revival which began in the last quarter of the 19th century was directly due to Ibsen's experiments in a new subject-matter for the drama. The social history of that period reveals a spirit of discontent which over all Europe was manifesting itself in a close scrutiny of social conditions. It was Ibsen who first saw the possibilities of the theatre as a medium for the presentment of an analysis of contemporary social life.

His influence upon English drama was immediately felt, and it initiated a kind of play which for the last fifty years has dominated our stage: the "Problem Play," the "Play of Ideas," the "Drama of Naturalism." The production of English versions of Ibsen's work not only created a keen interest in the problems he was preoccupied with, but impelled native writers to attempt the same kind of thing. Bernard Shaw, the most fluent of Ibsen's disciples, put very simply the principles of the new drama: "What really interests such people [the cultivated moderns] on the stage is not what we call action—meaning two well-known and rather short-sighted actors pretending to fight a duel without their glasses, or a handsome leading man chasing a beauteous leading lady round the stage with threats, obviously not feasible, of immediate rapine—but stories of lives, discussion of conduct, unveiling of motives, conflict of characters in talk, laying bare of souls, discovery of pitfalls—in short, *illumination* of life." It was the stimulus of the new subject-matter which stirred English drama from its hundred years of coma; just as a new interest, a new attitude, had a century earlier produced the Romantic Revival of the lyric. The introduction into the theatre of topics which excited thought and discussion was accompanied by a recovery of dramatic technique. The long reign of 19th-

century melodrama and sentimental comedy had given little scope for intelligent craftsmanship. No device or situation was too fantastic to be acceptable on the stage, since fidelity to probabilities was not required of plays which made no pretence to "illumination of life."

The rehabilitation of the playwright's craft was, in fact, begun before the new subject-matter was well established. Wilde, Pinero, and H. A. Jones were pioneers in making the theatre a place where a man need not have his intelligence outraged by incredible situations and wooden "characters." It is useless to discuss which was the hen and which the egg of the dramatic revival; for both the ideas of Ibsenism and the stage-craft of the others are manifestations of the awakening intelligence of theatre-going people towards the close of the century. The three dramatists mentioned may be placed in some transitional category, for the best work of each of them was based on some problem of society, e.g. *Lady Windermere's Fan, The Second Mrs. Tanqueray, Mrs. Dane's Defence.* They foreshadow the approaching domination of the problem play, and each of them shows a sense of realities—in situation, character, and *dénouement.*

One of Ibsen's greatest achievements was his influence on Bernard Shaw, and through him, on what is most representative of the drama of to-day. Shaw's response to Ibsen's call for a new dramatic material began with *Widowers' Houses* in 1892 and has reached its latest power of eloquence in the *Saint Joan* of 1924. Within that time, by going where the laws (or customs) of the drama told him it was impossible or perilous to go, he has added a new province to English drama.

If we may use convenient labels of criticism, we may say that he selects his material from reality and not from romance. What is called "action" irritates him; it is a display of romantic situations which are false to the life we know. What he deals in are dissections of modern industrial society—aspects of the life we live and know to-day. He gives not a picture of this life, as the Comedy of Manners was content to give of its own day, but a revelation of the motives and mistakes which underlie our actions and beliefs. He sees modern England, as Butler saw it in *Erewhon,* as a place where our values are topsy-turvy and where we keep truth discreetly obscured behind a veil of romantic notions. His business is to confront our sentimental notions on the stage with

the plain figure of Truth (in many disguises), and so to "illuminate" life.

The Play of Ideas too often becomes the play of one idea: the domestic triangle theme; but Shaw's realism covers a bigger range than that of sex. *The Doctor's Dilemma* attacks our superstitious reverence of the "medicine-man"; *Arms and the Man* ridicules our romantic conception of war; *Pygmalion* satirises our habit of setting up class distinctions on the basis of refinement of accent (the speech is but the guinea stamp, the girl's the gowd for a' that). Each play takes some aspect of present-day life and belief and endeavours to show how unintelligent it is. Romance is something which was true or may have been true, once upon a time, something which is not true here and now. To Shaw it is therefore the antithesis of truth, and he insists that "cultivated modern people" should rid themselves of the drug-mania for romance. He is the cure. And if his methods hurt—well, "All plays which deal sincerely with humanity must wound the monstrous conceit which it is the business of romance to flatter."

The material of his plays determines their technique. "Action" in the romantic sense can have no scope in the play of ideas. A sentence from his passage on Ibsen summarises his method of presentation: "the conflict of characters in talk." No play better illustrates his method than *Getting Married*, which has neither story nor construction (in the sense of working to a climax). Yet it holds attention on the stage—because Shaw's estimate of a modern cultivated audience is a just one. It *can* do without "action." But it must have some substitute; and it is, in fact, content to accept word-play instead of sword-play. To use the jargon of psychology, Shaw "sublimates" action, transfers it from the visible world to the world of ideas. Although no one is chasing another about the stage, the dialogue of the characters is running to and fro with brilliant dexterity. The duel between the Bishop of Chelsea and General Bridgnorth is no sanguinary one, but an engagement of wits in which the soldier is bound to lose. Father Anthony, using words instead of thumbscrews, is for that reason no less effective an inquisitor.

Shaw's greatest technical triumph is *Saint Joan*, where he carries his dramatic theory into one of the strongholds of romance, i.e. the story of a famous martyr. How little

"action"! yet how dramatic! The clash of idea against idea in the great Trial scene is carried on with a minimum of action; and even the mediæval costumes make little additional contribution to its dramatic effect.

Of the fundamental necessity for a conflict of characters Shaw is well aware; but, as he shows, the conflict may as well be mental as physical. If drama be the display of humanity in action, *in the terms which the age can best appreciate*, then Shaw is as typical a dramatist of this age as Shakespeare was of the Elizabethan. Words as well as weapons are manifestations of ideas: other times, other manners.

One of the commonest criticisms of Shaw's plays is that his characters are puppets. So earnest a propagandist as he is, faced with the problem of dissecting an illusion within three hours, runs risks of weak characterisation. The Idea is likely to fasten itself like a leech upon the play, sucking out the blood of the men and women in it. Shaw's difficulty evidently is to make the best use of his time. He certainly has the power of observation well enough developed to be able to draw a perfect sketch of character from the life—a character as representative of a credible individual as it is of the idea it stands for—but he has not got time enough to make a Blanco Posnet or an Alfred Doolittle for every play.

Too often the Idea dominates, so that the play often becomes a skittle-alley where dummies are set up to be knocked down. They are bullied into saying things which (from what we see of them) they really would not say, in order that the favoured rational characters may at once bludgeon them. Thus General Bridgnorth, life-like enough in the beginning, becomes before the end of the play a red-coated wooden soldier who may be bowled over from time to time to enliven the proceedings. Shaw has the comedian's knack of covering up a weak moment by a bit of slapstick diversion (again sublimated of course from the physical to the intellectual).

The imperfections of his characterisation are due to Shaw's anxiety to present his idea. What the character is "off-stage," so to speak, matters nothing. All that does matter is his attitude to the problem of the play. Traits which might give a more general impression of the person's nature are obliterated or ignored; traits which account for his attitude to the problem are underlined and caricatured. Yet each

character is human enough at bottom. What we criticise is some trimming which seems not material to the character at all. Shaw finds irresistible pleasure in drawing a quite credible person, and then crowning him with a dunce's cap or a false nose (sublimate again !). To appreciate his people one must either keep one's eyes off these trimmings, or else—and much better—acquire his capacity of enjoying that undercurrent of absurdity which flows in every character and in every situation in life itself.

Shaw's matter and method have provoked the suggestion that his plays lack a universal appeal. Shakespeare, beneath his romantic subject-matter and setting, has universality, so that the Hamlet problem is one which perennially fascinates us. Is Shaw presenting problems which the next generation will have answered ? or problems which will universally never find an answer ? Some of the plays have this universality as surely as others have not. *The Doctor's Dilemma* and *Getting Married*, for example, lack it because the questions they discuss are topical, and have been partly or fully answered already. *Saint Joan*, on the other hand, has universality, for as long as humanity lasts it will misunderstand those of its number who roam ahead of it on the outposts of thought. The last words of the play have an odd prophetic significance : " How long, O Lord, How long ? " Until that is answered *Saint Joan* will have an appeal.

For the rest, the virility of their subject-matter and the salted, pungent dialogue will preserve the plays. Shaw, one fancies, cares little for the prospects of his plays with the audience of to-morrow. To help solve to-day's entanglements is enough, for " Life . . . is a splendid torch which I have got hold of for the moment ; and I want to make it burn as brightly as possible before handing it on to future generations."

Galsworthy's plays, based on a social purpose similar to Shaw's, are different from his because Galsworthy's temper and outlook are different. If Shaw be pictured as an imp with a comic vision of distorted society, then Galsworthy is an earnest, compassionate missionary. He writes of the unimaginative discipline of the Law, of Marriage, of the iniquities of Class division, of the Mob Spirit. Each play takes some problem as its central situation, and the theme is developed by a subtle concentration of persons—in the traditional method of tragedy—towards some dramatic clash.

It seems inevitable that the Problem Play should be played with puppets rather than men—since the life they depict is the mechanical puppet show of circumstance; and Galsworthy's characters, like Shaw's, are frequently types. In the plays, these types are massed on each side of the central situation; its victims and its masters. The persons belong to one group or the other, and to that extent are of one shape and colour; but apart from that there is an attempt to differentiate them in extent of conviction, in manner, in their views on other things than the immediate situation.

Galsworthy's chief power is not, like Shaw's, command of dialogue, but of situation. The characters are drawn—or pushed—into situations that speak for themselves, e.g. the last scene in *Strife* where the two parties in the industrial dispute settle the fight over their leaders' heads. The workmen's leader and the chairman of the Company, Diehards of the finest mould, are sold by compromise; and the play is left at the tragic climax . . . "the two best men both broken."

Galsworthy, like Shaw, often permits the Idea to tyrannise over a play. When the latter drives his theory too hard, he can generally prevent disaster, or at least conceal it, by his witty dialogue. But Galsworthy, able to get his effects only by carefully devised situations, has nothing to fall back upon if the situation should be spoiled by its too obvious "Moral." A false step in comedy leads to nothing worse than farce, but in tragedy it can topple the play to ruin. Thus Galsworthy's eagerness to drive home the moral in *The Mob* results in the painfully jarring effect of the Tableau at the end of the play; and again in *The Fugitive*, the over-dominant idea sends the play floundering more than once.

Galsworthy's tragedies on social themes show how far modern conceptions have extended the former scope and methods of tragedy. The clash of man with circumstance, ending inevitably with the man's defeat, has always been the text of tragedy. And great tragedy has an essential universal appeal; i.e. the particular clash of the play must be an illustration of that general principle by which circumstance is always too strong for men. If the play is to have universality the dramatist must make the hero as representative as possible of that generalisation of humanity which we call Man. Ancient and mediæval tragedy found the highest symbolisation of humanity in the figure of a king; and for the Eliza-

bethans the same principle held good—tragedy was the downfall of princes. This conception was of course based on a genuine effort to make Man as ideally mighty as possible, so that the spectacle of his inevitable downfall would be completely catastrophic.

Modern tragedy, as Galsworthy's plays illustrate, has a different conception of the tragic figure. He may be democratised into middle-class or working-class. He is not such a rare, ideal person ; he represents the rule rather than the exception. So tragedy, like comedy, loses its romantic flavour, and is brought closer to the conditions of the life we live and understand. Each of Galsworthy's characters stands for a class or a belief, representing more than himself, even as the former tragic hero stood for ideals greater than himself. The use of a single figure to represent man remains unchanged ; but now he represents a more definite particularised humanity. Roberts, the strike leader, is the symbol of beliefs and qualities that are wider than his own personality ; Falder, the pathetic clerk, is a universal figure of Man as the victim of circumstances.

Although the Play of Ideas dominates the drama of this century, there are some playwrights whose work is out of sympathy with the problem play. No plainer antithesis, in matter or in style, to Shaw can be imagined than Barrie. He has, on the stage, little or no social criticism to offer ; but, taking men and women as they are, he tries to make the romantic best of them. In a sober, hard-thinking world where the other dramatists are tearing away illusions and confronting us with the horrid shapes of things as they are, he is the boy who refuses to grow up. Although we know—and he too knows—how much he is behind the times, his romantic, sentimental appeal is strong ; for to be happy we must sometimes be blind to things as they are.

But there is a paradox in Romance, since it sometimes leads us unexpectedly back to real life. Barrie, aiming at no moral lesson, has written some romances which are as true to life as anything in the realist drama. *What Every Woman Knows*, under the guise of a romantic comedy, displays an evident truth about the dependence of man on woman; *The Admirable Crichton*, masked in a similar way, brings us to a comprehension of the relative unimportance of social rank.

Barrie's characters, having no " point of view " to maintain,

are human and credible ; they are men and women, and not theories in skirts and trousers. Many modern dramatists have the habit of incorporating in the text of their published plays detailed stage-directions and character-descriptions. Barrie, novelist as well as playwright, sprinkles his plays with phrases in parenthesis which make it plain that each character of his creation has a fully developed existence in the dramatist's mind. Before the play is written, one imagines, each character has been modelled in every grace and every oddity. Every feature and every habit seem to have been mellowing for years in Barrie's imagination ; there is no fresh paint about them, no sign of their having been hurriedly touched up for an occasion. And in this respect they are more convincing than some, at least, of Shaw's and Galsworthy's people. The simple fact that they have nothing to be "earnest" about gives them an appearance of reality which the realist often fails to achieve.

This careful preparation of characters, as it were before the play begins, does not mean that Barrie is not able to carry them into action in the play itself and reveal them by what they do. His gift of stage-craft is strong, and may be well illustrated by *The Admirable Crichton*. The metamorphosis of the perfect butler into the natural leader when his aristocratic employers are wrecked on a desert island is done by a series of infinitely delicate strokes, reaching a powerful climax in the arrival of a rescue ship. Crichton and Lady Mary, inevitably in love by the decree of natural selection, face the moment of renunciation. The crisis is handled superbly, the mask of civilisation swiftly and tragically replaced. "(By an effort of will he ceases to be an erect figure ; he has the humble bearing of a servant. His hands come together as if he were washing them.)

Crichton (it is the speech of his life) : My lady."

There are other dramatists of the century whose work has little in common with those already mentioned. J. M. Synge produced, among others, two plays which are singularly different from each other. *Riders to the Sea* is a short tragedy on the motif of a woman robbed of all her men by the insatiable sea. It is a play which cannot "date," for like a Greek tragedy it stands outside Time ; and it stands outside Place, for the Ireland where it is enacted is as immaterial as

the Denmark of *Hamlet*. Having nothing to do with any topical problem or any specialised social conditions, it possesses the quality of universality which we find in the story of Job and of Agamemnon. It is one more of those moving visions of the futility of the human struggle with inexorable Fate. His other chief play, *The Playboy of the Western World*, was a romantic comedy which its first Irish audience very sensitively mistook for a violent satire. The Irish love of fantasy is in the play typified by the popular reception given all over the countryside to a young man who is reputed to have killed his father. Synge's effort to show that Ireland loves an Original even among murderers was taken by his countrymen as a libel on their moral integrity. These plays are notable for one quality which nowadays is less valued than it was by the Elizabethans: beauty of diction. Shaw has pictured Shakespeare wandering about London with his tablets in hand, jotting down striking phrases as he heard them spoken by passers-by. This was actually Synge's method in a country where speech still tries to be no less lovely than useful. What he heard, moulded with a little artistry, became that rich and expressive Anglo-Irish idiom of the plays.

In two very short prefaces Synge has summarised a dramatic theory of rare value. It is almost entirely contrary to current views, but it contains truths which drama can ignore only at its peril. First, as to the deficiencies of the problem play, he says: "The drama is made serious—in the French sense of the word—not by the degree in which it is taken up with problems that are serious in themselves, but by the degree in which it gives the nourishment, not very easy to define, on which our imaginations live. . . . The drama, like the symphony, does not teach or prove anything. Analysts with their problems, and teachers with their systems, are soon as old-fashioned as the pharmacopœia of Galen . . . but the best plays of Ben Jonson and Molière can no more go out of fashion than the blackberries on the hedges." Secondly, he demands a beautiful and virile diction. Ingenious plot and clever characterisation, he says, are not enough: "In a good play every speech should be as fully flavoured as a nut or apple, and such speeches cannot be written by anyone who works among people who have shut their lips on poetry."

Another trend of the modern drama is seen in the prose chronicle-plays of Drinkwater. Here again are the Ideas of

the day, but clothed in romantic costume and set against a romantic background. Lincoln and Cromwell are symbols of modern political idealism, Mary Stuart is the symbol of the temperamental spirit battling against its blind contemporaries. This is a difficult undertaking, for the symbols are constantly threatening to swamp the individuals. The Big Names of the play are all the time uneasily trying to live up to their historical reputations. Evidently a dramatist must be handicapped by having to work with characters which are in part ready-made. The only successful way of dealing with historical persons seems to be Shakespeare's way : take their names, and then let them go.

Besides these, there are other fields of modern drama which cannot here be explored. The poetic tradition survives in the plays of Yeats and Gordon Bottomley ; and in those plays of Masefield and Flecker which, though written in prose, possess an exaltation which transmutes them into the stuff of poetry. Of *Hassan* one may incidentally observe that the modern concern with ideas shows itself even in this romantic tragedy. The play is swayed by the idea that somewhere, in some dim Samarcand, the principle of Beauty persists. When rank, riches, and love all fail, there yet remains " The Golden Road."

Somewhat related to the play of ideas is the comedy of contemporary manners, whose leading creators are A. A. Milne and Somerset Maugham. Generally speaking, they attempt to do for this age what Congreve and Sheridan did before them. Theirs not, like Shaw, to reason why ; but to present a picture of the foibles of the richer classes. Of all modern drama these plays inevitably have least of the universal touch about them ; and in fact often demand an acquaintance with their specialised themes and persons which can be possessed only by that part of the audience which buys the most expensive seats in the theatre. It is possible, as Shakespeare used to show, and as Shaw can show to-day, to write a play about aristocrats which a plebeian can appreciate. But the modern drawing-room comedy is content to keep to the glossy surface of the society it displays.

Modern drama cannot escape from the problems of modern society. This one may deplore or rejoice at, according to one's age or one's prejudice. The risks which it runs by propagandising on topics which live to-day and are to-morrow forgotten

have been mentioned. But if the play have in it something besides a topical theme, some notable characterisation or memorable dialogue, it will interest a later generation. And, failing that, there is a virtue in writing for the age no less than in writing for posterity. The drama could do worse than regard itself as a social service, presenting in action those difficulties which Society here and now should solve—or at least discuss. So the wheel may come full circle ; and the drama which began as an auxiliary service to the church may share (or usurp, if it prove strong enough) the duty of rousing the people to a sense of their deficiencies.

CHAPTER VII

THE PROVINCE OF PROSE

I

POPULAR usage does not trouble to distinguish from each other the terms poetry and verse; but when we are considering the nature of prose it is necessary to appreciate some fundamental distinctions. "Poetry" has two meanings: the first a wide one, the other limited and technical. In the first sense we use the word to signify a quality which may be revealed in any of the Arts, as well as in Nature and Man. We recognise "Poetry" whenever our imagination is stirred by a supreme realisation of Beauty—in a sunrise, a sonata, a ship under full sail, a sonnet, a piece of prose, a human deed. Whenever the imagination responds to a fine thought or a fine vision, then is poetry generated. Until Man sees it, poetry cannot exist; for it lives not in itself, but through its apprehension by the human imagination. There was no poetry in the natural shapes and colours of earth and sky until the primitive man came and responded, however faintly, to their beauty. It is at once subjective and objective, a distillation of external things made by man's inner vision. Briefly, it is Beauty, instinctively recognised at sight, and yet of such faery substance that, once faded, it can in retrospect be no more described than Bottom's dream.

If we narrow down this meaning of the word and limit ourselves to poetry in literature, its nature remains the same. It is not only the saying of beautiful things but the hearing of them. It is a co-operative achievement between those who give utterance and those who respond. The qualities which make poetry are shared, though not equally, between the poet and the reader: the creative power of the one needs the delicate response of the other for its full embodiment.

A further narrowing process, which is essential for our purpose here, restricts the word poetry to the written word,

the Aaron's rod that strikes comprehension from the reader. Poetry is, in this sense, an exalted expression of thought of which we are made aware as instinctively as by the poetry we realise elsewhere. It may be an expression in verse or in prose. Mr. J. C. Squire has pointed out that when prose handles such a theme as Mortality it begins to take on the semblance of poetry. The stimulus of this most majestic of human themes evokes a power that is as lofty as the subject-matter. "Emotion deepens suddenly, or reaches an unexpected climax . . . the author comes to a place at which his expression assumes a sublimity of imagery and a perfection of rhythm." Such a climax does Raleigh attain in the well-known passage "O eloquent, just and mighty death. . . ." When the exalted idea calls forth this supreme power of utterance, poetry is written. It is the Everest of expression, a level which the writer approaches by a superlative effort, wins in a burst of exaltation, and forsakes since no man can long endure so rarefied an atmosphere.

Poetry then, in its widest sense, is a quality that all modes of literary expression may possess. Its second meaning is more or less identified in common usage with *verse*. And since in this book we are concerned with literary form, we need not enforce the rather subtle distinction between verse and poetry. We accept poetry here as meaning that technique which is the antithesis to prose and roughly synonymous with verse. As regards technique only are we justified in speaking of poetry and prose as the two modes of literary expression.

II

The first and greatest difference between the two is in their rhythmic structure. Verse is a pattern, repeated according to the skill of the poet, throughout the lines. The unit of the pattern is the foot or bar, and through all the variations and modifications of the verse, this basic pattern must persist. If it is lost or confused, the verse breaks down. The derivation of "Verse" (versus) emphasises the nature of poetry as a turning or returning pattern; as opposed to the unorganised, unpatterned, straightforward march of "Prose" (prosus, straight on). The power of the poet to design his pattern is a measure of his poetic skill. If he is capable of no more than a repetition of the unit (e.g. early blank verse, or the mass production of the heroic couplet), he is merely a versifier. If

he can vary his pattern unexpectedly and without destroying its unity, he has mastered one of the hardest of the poet's tasks.

Prose has rhythm in so far as one can speak no words at all without stressing parts of them; but the rhythm of prose falls with no recurring pattern. A line of blank verse may indeed occur in a prose passage, but it has got there in spite of the writer, evaded him, and offends our taste because it has no right to be there. In *The Rivals*, Act IV. sc. 2, Sheridan unconsciously falls into a blank-verse rhythm that makes bad prose, because it is careless prose. *Absolute*—"There is the heavenly assenting smile / that first gave soul and spirit to my hopes, / those are the lips which sealed a vow, as yet / scarce dry in Cupid's calendar! and there / the half-resentful blush that would have checked / the ardour of my thanks! Well, all that's past! / " Excellent blank verse, with run-on lines, too! But bad prose.

III

As an art form poetry existed long before writing, and long before print, and so acquired that characteristic musical rhythm that has rooted itself in the technique of poetry. Prose, lacking the means of memorisation, was, in England, still feeling for a technique when the printing-press was set up. And it found its scope rather rigorously defined by its lusty elder sister. It was excluded for a long time from expressing emotion: narrative was considered its natural domain. But although poetry had a long start from prose, this does not account for the fact that it remains to-day the more highly keyed expression of emotion. The real reason lies in the *difference of pitch* between poetry and prose: the one musical, and therefore highly emotional; the other not essentially musical, and therefore not essentially emotional.

If prose is less charged with emotion than poetry, it follows that it possesses more leisure, more length. It is used for themes that demand a broad, not a deep expression. Sweetest music is brief and can express only the keenest moments. To prose falls the business of expressing what happens in the more subdued periods of experience. The essayist writes placidly and broadly of his reactions during a moonlight walk. Shelley concentrates on one supreme moment of his walk and gives that piercing music of

"Art thou pale for weariness. . . ."

In poetry of length, such as Shakespeare's plays, the intensity of poetry is never sustained; but rises in crests after lines of facile description or narration. Prose has not often to bear the strain of these emotional crises. It moves at a slower, quieter pace. Yet in prose one will sometimes find those passages where, as Mr. Squire says, "Emotion deepens suddenly," and at such moments prose, taking the wings of music, attains the exaltation of poetry.

Prose is fundamentally different from poetry in two respects: Rhythm and Key. But in some ways prose shares the musical qualities of verse: in certain devices, which, originally used by poet alone, are now shared with prose. Of these the two most obvious are vowel-music and onomatopœia. (See Ruskin, for example, or De Quincey, for the first; and, say, Carlyle for the other.) One musical device, rime, is excluded from prose simply because its presence would create that repeating pattern which is as foreign to prose as it is essential to verse.

One of the most immediate effects of music on language was to give a new order of words to poetry. It is easy to understand that the natural order of speech is not fitted for the requirements of music; so from early times poetry acquired an order of words different from that of prose. It is an inevitable reorganisation of words—

> "I set her on my pacing steed
> And nothing else saw all day long."

Music making free of "natural order" to articulate sweet sounds together!

Prose was not at first asked to make music; but to make sense only. The practice of literature during the last three centuries has, however, weakened the prerogative of poetry to use such devices as inversion, and strengthened the claim of prose to avail itself of a device that makes music. Prose claims more and more to speak sense as musically as it can. Early prose restricted itself to the loose sentence, a pleasant, straightforward method, but with manifest limitations. But as early as Bunyan it was, for the sake of music as well as of emphasis, taking liberties with natural order, e.g. "My sword I give to him that shall succeed me. . . . My marks and scars I carry with me. . . ."

Prose as well as poetry is an art form. It is very different from speech, inasmuch as it originated in the artificial mode

of rhetoric. In its early days it lacked the means of refining itself. It was used for occasions, and, for reasons we have seen, was not memorisable. The printing-press has given prose leisure, and leisure has made it ambitious to perfect itself as a literary form. It seeks means of separating itself more and more from language that is simply utilitarian—the language of forum and pulpit and market-place; and its readiest means of separation from everyday speech are by the devices of music.

IV

A verse diction different from that of prose was inevitable when words surrendered themselves to the sway of music and emotion. Under the power of any emotion, for example, the religious one that precedes prayer, or the angry one that stage villains love ("Never darken my doors again"), we select our language from words that are excluded from everyday use. Words are, so to speak, consecrated to emotion; and the "best" words, the most coloured, most musical words will naturally be reserved for the use of the poet.

Unfortunately, convention loses sight of first principles; and by the 18th century poetic diction had become a collection of idiosyncrasies. Poetry was written in a language of its own, not because it sprang from transcendent emotions, but because Fashion said: At all costs we must seem different from the language of everyday. Its beauty was not a natural, inevitable beauty, but the complexion of seeming-beauty, manufactured by the cosmetics of artificial diction, conventional rimes, and elaborate personification.

Against this barren poetic diction Wordsworth launched his manifesto; and naturally had to go to extremes to make his point. Cannot poetry be made from the speech of everyday? Are not the great emotions fundamentally simple? and cannot simple words be effectively used to express them? He advocated a diction less conscious even than that of prose—the language of daily use. In their language, poetry and prose were to be brought nearer to each other; while their essential rhythmic and emotional differences remained.

Wordsworth's warning was timely in so far as it protested against the use of the jargon of "espy," "'twixt," "meseems," etc. But in its suggestion of a common vocabulary for prose and verse it is, as Wordsworth's practice itself showed, unsound; and for these reasons:

(1) The higher key of emotion in which verse is pitched demands a more intense use of words. In poetry a word is often an Atlas supporting a whole world of meaning which in prose could be distributed over a dozen words. The poet has more rigorously to select his language—and this process inevitably results in a diction separate from that of prose.

"I set her on my pacing steed."

Nothing will do there except "steed." Inevitability is never far from the best poetry.

(2) Verse is more musical than prose. So the poet must in his selection find words that suit not only the sense of his idea, but that fit it musically. The prose-writer can be content with a word that adequately expresses his thought.

(3) In the brief space of a poem, the poet must produce not only emotion and music, but colour. A single word must create a complete picture. This again necessitates a closer choice of words than prose requires.

For these reasons poetry must use a diction of its own; but that is not to say that prose may take no pains in its choice of words. As prose has become more and more consciously an art form, it has gradually insisted on using the musical graces of language; and contemporary prose, in particular, shows very elaborate care in its diction. At the same time there is in contemporary verse a tendency to avoid any kind of conventional poetic diction. Prose and Verse seem to be experimenting towards a closer alliance. They both interpret intense emotional experiences, they claim no exclusive rights of language; and in the newest developments of free verse, the last stronghold of verse—its metre—is being surrendered to the irregularities of prose rhythm.

V

Ever since prose freed itself from the bondage of mere narrative, it has claimed the right to elaborate itself with imagery. Prose as well as verse may use all the suggestion and stimulus that simile and metaphor provide. True, it has not the vital need of imagery that poetry has; for the poet, unable to sustain his emotion for more than a brief time, must use suggestion to achieve his purpose of exciting his hearer. He must, by the use of imagery, sketch pictures that our

imagination may complete. But prose, though it may move more leisurely, may none the less have its moments of suggestion and graphic comparison.

During his study of the following chapter, which attempts a survey of English prose, the reader is recommended to use a good prose anthology by which he may weigh for himself the estimates given, and in which he may find his own illustrations of good prose. For convenience a rough catalogue may be given here of the accepted characteristics of good prose: many of these will be revealed in the earliest prose; but many will not be found until the 18th and 19th centuries are reached.

(1) Lucidity: the quality that makes the writer's meaning at once clear, and avoids any suggestion of ambiguity.

(2) Appropriateness: a selection and arrangement of language that fits the matter and the mood; the art of saying a grave thing soberly, and a light one merrily.

(3) An accompaniment of sound that harmonises with the subject-matter—a selection of words not for the meaning alone, but for their sound: an extension of (2).

(4) Variety: a judicious blending of sentence lengths, and a skilled use of inversion, repetition, balance, etc.

(5) The use of the best words—the avoidance of the use of hybrid words that the English language has not assimilated. "Medical opinion has stated . . ." is a poor shadow of the simple fact that "The doctor said. . . ." This disease is called Johnsonese, Jargon, etc.

(6) Unity: Macaulay can tell us what this means.—The organisation of thought into platoons and battalions: each thought neatly expressed in one sentence; and each group of related thoughts into one paragraph. This is the first principle of logical writing; but all prose, be it remembered, is not under the necessity of being logical. The trick of "flighting" random thoughts in Lamb's manner is no less important a part of the craft of prose-writing.

CHAPTER VIII

THE DEVELOPMENT OF ENGLISH PROSE

I

MODERN English prose dates roughly from the 14th century, and significantly enough, limited itself for some time to translation from other languages. One of its earliest problems was the discovery of a style and a vocabulary, and there is no surer way of developing these in a "new" language than that of using it for purposes of translation. The subject-matter is there ready to hand, so that all the writer's power may be concentrated on the actual rendering from one language to the other. Mandeville's *Travels*, and Wyclif's Bible, the two outstanding prose accomplishments of the century, were early exercises in the new art.

After this experimental beginning, there comes a period of intense concentration upon prose. From 1470 to 1597 prose style develops through innovation and experiment, reaching its finest accomplishment, in the latter year, in the *Essays* of Francis Bacon. The first book of the period was Malory's *Morte d'Arthur*, a quick-moving narrative, translated and "adapted" from the French. This work reveals the author's bold intention of fashioning a prose style from the ordinary speech of his time. This is the first stage in the natural evolution of prose. It is first of all rough-hewn from common speech, and through succeeding generations fined down and trimmed and decorated into an art form.

The book was printed by a man who had very much at heart the welfare of the English tongue. Caxton had been a translator long before he began as a pioneer printer, and he had been faced with a grave problem in the making of his translations. What vocabulary was he to use? What words to accept or reject from the many dialects that still stood in the way of a "standard English"? His method of dealing with this difficulty was the very drastic one of excluding

dialect ; but a pioneer must be drastic, and the development of a standard prose in English owes a good deal of its success to Caxton's uncompromising determination. He realised that, as a late starter, English prose could gain something from the foreign works he was translating and printing. He speaks favourably of the easy style of French prose, and in his own work definitely strove after the graces of the French.

Twenty-five years after the death of this indefatigable craftsman, Thomas More's *Utopia* appeared, but in Latin. By his decision to write in the language of scholars More lost an opportunity of writing the first great prose work in the English tongue. He of all men of the early 16th century had the judgment and sensibility to write the epitome of all that English had learned since the rude 'prentice days of Wyclif. Pupil and friend of Colet and Erasmus, he was one of the Renascence pioneers who had mined deeply into the new learning ; and withal he was the type of true English patriot. A work of such momentous social and political value and of such imaginative range as the *Utopia* would have shown what English prose could make of non-narrative writing. Although More thought English " plenteous enough to express our myndes in anye thing whereof one man hath use to speke with another," yet he used it only for the lesser work, *A History of Edward V and Richard III* (which seems after all to have been a translation from an earlier Latin version).

Several of More's contemporaries, however, carried on the Caxton tradition of learning from foreign prose. For example, Lord Berners, courtier, scholar, and traveller, made a translation of Froissart's *Chronicles* that shows once more this early power of English prose to sustain narrative expression. John Foxe in the popular *Book of Martyrs* displays the same ready control over narrative prose. The qualities of this group of writers may be summarised thus :

(1) Power to describe events.
(2) A simple diction.
(3) A lack of control over rhythm.
(4) Clumsy sentence construction.

English prose still remained to be tested under sterner conditions. So far subject-matter had been supplied, in the form of a story which the writers had simply to translate or record. As a vehicle of original thought, as an expression of ideas,

prose had not yet been achieved. Ease and flexibility could not be attained until it had undergone those refinements that come from wrestling with a subject-matter more exacting than narrative. To tell a story is comparatively easy; to give lucid and exact expression to ideas is difficult.

II

The bending of English prose to non-narrative expression was attempted in a variety of manners. Roger Ascham is a notable figure in English prose for two reasons. Firstly, although he was, like More, a scholar and Latinist, he resisted the scholarly fashion of writing in Latin, quite definitely declaring (in *Toxophilus*) that he proposed to write "English matter in the English speech for English men." Now, though this slogan may have been no more æsthetic in intention than "English goods for Englishmen," yet this nationalist prejudice was an excellent thing for our prose. It gave the opportunity for practice and experiments. Happily his scholarship had inculcated into Ascham the Latin virtues of clarity and simplicity; and these, allied to his zeal for an all-English diction, made his style pleasant and felicitous.

Secondly, he attempted the more difficult kind of subject-matter—exposition and criticism. His first book was a treatise on archery; the second, on education. He writes on these subjects in a straightforward, plain style, with a rhythm that does not sprawl like Malory's or Berners's, and a grace that handles the matter with speed and precision; but he retains those wearisome mediæval devices of alliteration (inherited from early poetry) and antithesis that still shackled Elizabethan prose.

When a poet begins to write prose, he does so with an ear for musical effects. And when he is an Elizabethan poet his music is clear and limpid. Sidney's prose is very like his life: great-hearted, imaginative, and beautiful; and though it has not, any more than its contemporaries, mastered the secret of rhythm, yet in its most involved periods it has a charm of cadence that is original in English prose. Here again is the more difficult task attempted of writing of abstractions. A more difficult subject for infant prose could hardly be found than an *Apologie for Poetry;* but this, the first attempt in English at literary criticism, was debonairly and triumphantly written, and survives to-day as a penetrating exposition of the

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poetic basis of all literature. Ascham and Sidney had much in common : a sure grasp of their subject and a power of clear statement ; but their manners were completely different. Ascham suspected anything like elegance ; Sidney showed that prose could be clear without scorning the adornments customarily reserved for poetry. Their joint contribution to prose is as perfect a blend as could be desired.

The next of the Elizabethan prosemen tackled a subject-matter even more exacting than literary criticism, and his achievement is further proof of the growing tractability of prose under the spur of non-narrative matter. Hooker's *Laws of Ecclesiastical Polity*—a defence of the Established Church against Rome and Geneva—handles its trying theme with unexpected success. Although Latin construction sometimes plays havoc with the sentences, Hooker had a sense of balance, and aimed at symmetrical structure. Though the style now and then has "a monstrous beauty, like the hind-quarters of an elephant," its very massiveness and dignity make it a model of careful writing.

The last of this group of Elizabethans did not exclude narrative from his work. Walter Ralegh, gallant, traveller, poet like Sidney, wrote some very vivid accounts of his voyages, e.g. *The Discovery of Guiana*. These are quick-moving narrative, told in simple and often colloquial language ; but his monumental *History of the World* displays a finer prose. Here he writes not only of the events of history, but of abstractions and speculations, repeating the witness already given by Ascham, Sidney, and Hooker, that English prose can excel even when it has no story to write. As many famous passages in it show, there is, for once in Elizabethan prose, a strong rhythm, responsive to the emotional play of the subject-matter upon it. It possesses every virtue of fine prose : concreteness, suggestive imagery, balance, and noble diction. Here at last is English prose, free from obvious "influence," schooled by the classics, yet not an imitation, utterly English in its simplicity, its cadence, its virility.

But all Elizabethan prose was not of this calibre. The very graces of music and colour that, sensitively used by Ralegh and Sidney, adorned prose, were less surely employed by Lyly. To a large extent Lyly's style was dominated by the substance of *Euphues*. The hero is a courtier of Athens whose adventures are found in fashionable society, and such a milieu

demands a style appropriate to it. The distinctive features of what has since been called Euphuism are those commonly associated with courtiers : a mincing gait of speech, a pretty nosegay of words. There is, too, the courtly affectation of smart sayings, epigram, and antithesis. Lyly displays all these tricks in sentences that balance like a pendulum. When prose begins to give itself airs we may assume that it is beginning to feel itself of consequence in the world. Lyly's elaboration, though quickly becoming tiresome, is a definite indication that prose is getting interested in itself. And there are more worthy qualities in *Euphues:* a sound sense of structure, revealed in antithetic sentences which give point to the substance, and occasionally simple, vigorous diction, that makes a welcome change from the modish speech of courtiers.

Consciously or not, Lyly hit upon a fundamental æsthetic principle when he devised a prose style that was distinct from colloquial speech. He actually mentions the Englishman's desire " to hear a finer speech than the language will allow " ; and in *Euphues* he provides this. Obviously it is not for the first time that we find writing that is different from the every-day speech of the times ; but Lyly makes the distinction very definite and therefore more striking. This consciousness of itself as a language different both from that of the poet, and from that of the man in the street, makes Lyly's prose a land-mark. His excesses were a sign of this consciousness, and, pruned as they were by later writers, introduced the very good habit of giving a flair and colour to prose.

There remain to be considered two other writers of the period, each of whom adds a peculiar and notable contribution to the medley of prose styles that the age loved. The first of them, Dekker, shares Ascham's preference for the diction of everyday use ; but, in so far as his discourse is upon lighter topics than Ascham's, his style has a raciness and gusto that the other lacks. There is in it that note of companionableness that, many years later, warms the essays of Goldsmith and Lamb. As a contrast to the point-device of so much Eliza-bethan prose, Dekker's déshabillé style is complete.

It is fitting that a survey of the Elizabethan prose writers should finish with Francis Bacon, for in him is the residuum of all the experiment and innovation of his forerunners. His writing is unadulterated by their excesses ; it is the distillation of the many manners of prose writing up to 1600. The failings

so far revealed in English prose were, first, unwieldiness, whereby thought was too often entangled in a long-drawn-out sentence; secondly, a tendency to "fine writing." Bacon was the first scientific philosopher to write English, and, not for the first time, the scientific manner produced a clean, terse style. The *Essays* have a note of authority about them; something of the definite tone in which an analyst, having tested the properties of the substances presented to him, makes a conclusive report on them. This dogmatic manner is natural, too, to the lawyer. Francis Bacon was also Lord Chancellor Bacon; and the essays are very reminiscent of legal judgments of some supreme authority. There is in his writing a pithiness and relevance that hitherto had rarely been found in prose.

But, despite the brevity of his utterance, Bacon was Elizabethan in his power of imaginative suggestion; and in their final form, the essays are illumined with beautiful and moving imagery.

In his Utopia, *The New Atlantis*, he writes less guardedly, and so with more ease and speed than in the *Essays*. It is a fitting commentary on the condition of prose by Bacon's time that he himself was not at all satisfied with his works as written in English, and, with an eye to their chance of survival, got them done into Latin! Himself a fine classical scholar, he distrusted (to Ben Jonson's disgust) his native prose as an adequate form of expression. Yet while Bacon was doubting its power, there appeared a work that might have set his mind at rest.

III

Curiously enough, the *Authorized Version* of 1611 did not make a great stir on its publication. Yet it was a production that towers above anything hitherto done in English prose. Its debt to the earlier translators, especially to Tyndale and Coverdale, was freely admitted by its compilers; but it is by no means a mere revision and polishing of Tyndale. The Forty-seven Translators who began their labours in 1607 worked directly from the originals, and they seem to have been as interested in style as in doctrine.

They succeeded—as Tyndale had done, and for the same reason—because they translated direct and not from a Latin version which had already lost the flavour of the original. Their achievement was possible because of the remarkably

adaptable nature of those originals. Hebrew, like English, is a simple, concrete language ; unlike the abstract Latin which delights in intricate expression. It is an unsophisticated language, meet for an age which reacts forcibly to a visible world. As children personify natural objects, so the Hebrews saw the world about them alive with the manifestations of God. So their language is picturesque, simple as a child's, and entirely free from philosophic and scientific expression. It has, too, a lyrical fervour that repeatedly carries it altogether beyond the frontiers of prose. These characteristics, if they are to be revealed in a translation, require a tongue that is itself as simple as Hebrew. Such was Elizabethan English ; in spite of the passing fashion of elaboration, simple and concrete ; a tongue that was practised in narrative ; rich and graphic in imagery ; and, finally, of supreme lyrical power. The alliance of two tongues as sympathetic to each other as the Hebrew and the English was sealed in the Authorized Version of the Old Testament.

The New Testament was originally written in a language that was, like Hebrew, not a scholars' speech, but a people's —in the vernacular Greek. It was, however, an altogether bigger language, inasmuch as it was the tongue of a wider, deeper, more universal civilisation ; capable not only of fluent narrative, but of the expression of subtle speculations and abstractions. So it could adequately meet the various demands made by the subject-matter of the New Testament—story, philosophy, and fantasy. It had a facility of speaking parables, as well as control of abstract thought. So old a language, refined through so ancient and powerful a literature, was flexible enough to express every nuance of meaning—and this without resorting to a vocabulary or structure that were not in common use. It was this colloquial Greek which the Forty-seven had to render into English. The result reveals a sympathy between Greek and English, no less remarkable than that between English and Hebrew. The Gospels in English have the same free narrative style as the Greek ; the English winds its way as skilfully as the Greek into the metaphysics of the Epistles.

This twofold alliance—English with Hebrew, and English with Greek—befel at a time when English was ripe for something like standardisation. It had no more to learn from Latin, or, rather, would have suffered in its native possibilities

from any further domination by Latin. The Translators had at hand a prose roughly moulded by two hundred years of experiment. It needed some compelling formative influence that would fix its future development along congenial lines. That influence came in the Hebrew Old Testament and the Greek New Testament; and in the *Authorized Version* were illustrated those powers that had been latent in English prose.

Briefly stated, the characteristics of the translation are:—

(1) Control of rhythm: hitherto the commonest stumbling-block in prose.

(2) Versatility of expression: adequate for narrative, prophecy, and speculation.

(3) Rich vocabulary: with a debt to the Classics as well as to Saxon.

(4) Lucidity: again a virtue lacking in the prolix, non-narrative writing of the Elizabethans.

It is not uncommon to underrate, or even to ignore, the influence of the *Authorized Version* on later prose—as a "self-made" man of business might roundly disallow any credit to others for his success. A modern writer may well be unaware of any *immediate* debt of his to the Bible; but, in so far as he writes prose that has for three hundred years built itself upon the manner and inspiration of the Bible, he is in debt to the Forty-seven. For we have not only the "internal" evidence of great books to show how much prose owes the Bible, but the direct testimony of such men as Milton, Bunyan, Addison, Carlyle, and Ruskin.

IV

In the 17th century, even after the appearance of the *Authorized Version*, English prose had still a variety of manners; but, broadly speaking, these may be classified into two groups. There was, firstly, the continuation of the classical tradition, maintained by the widespread devotion to the Latin and Greek examples; and, secondly, there was the less scholarly but more English prose that had been so triumphantly employed in the *Authorized Version*. In Milton the two strains were mingled. In Sir Thomas Browne's *Religio Medici*, the prose is undiluted "classical"; while *The Pilgrim's Progress* derives from nothing but the Bible.

Browne's companions in the use of the more elaborate prose style that had been schooled by Latin and Greek were Traherne and Jeremy Taylor. Bunyan's simple, unadorned, vigorous Biblical style was, in various degrees, shared by Izaak Walton, Clarendon, Locke, Dryden, and Swift. Nothing can better illustrate the transitional nature of prose during this century than a comparison of the work of Browne and Bunyan: the one polished, elegant, scholarly, ornate, full of what Lamb called "beautiful obliquities"; the other not only simple, but colloquial, homely, unadorned. The reader should compare the passage from the *Religio Medici* beginning, "We term sleep a death; and yet it is waking that kills us, and destroys those spirits that are the house of life," with Bunyan's story of Giant Despair.

English prose needed both those powers; the stately rhythm and careful sentences of Browne, as well as the rapid, graphic utterance of Bunyan. Both of them have the power to say a thing greatly. Walton is Bunyan as he might have been had he not "got religion"—a pleasant, domesticated fellow with the knack of expressing himself vividly and adequately in a garrulous, conversational manner. Clarendon's *History of the Great Rebellion* continues this colloquial manner of writing, and incidentally reveals (as Bunyan often did) the dangers of the colloquial style; for though his diction is simple and his narrative skill evident, he frequently gets involved in cumbersome sentences, and has no sense of rhythm at all.

V

The 17th century closes with Dryden, whose prose is a near neighbour to our own, for in construction and syntax there have been very few changes since his day. This standard modern prose was evolved to meet utilitarian requirements—somewhat as blank verse was a form produced to suit the practical necessity of the stage. Style is, after all, the expression of some subject-matter or other; and evidently the matter must very largely determine the manner. What apter form of expression for the unsophisticated infant—be it an individual or a nation—could there be than the Ballad or the Epic, the plain story? Or what more inevitable expression of the swelling Elizabethan spirit than the Drama? The age of Dryden was beyond these stages in its growth; bored with Romanticism and poetic exuberance. Such a condition is

indeed desirable if child or nation is to become a well-developed adult; and the habit of decrying the Classical age is silly in so far as it forgets this necessity. It was something deeper, more radical, than a change of fashion. Imagination had had Literature to itself for two hundred years, and had shown clear signs of running to seed. The critical faculty now demanded a hearing. The 18th century, whose prophet was Dryden, was possessed of the critical spirit. It was disillusioned. Its interest was not in that sphere of imagination that we call Poetry, but in its immediate environment, i.e. the social and political life of the time. Criticism and analysis were to be the substance of its literature. This substance produced an appropriate style.

In the first place, Dryden's was a prose *style*, not a prose manner. Up to his time there cannot be said to be a conscious style in prose at all. Malory, Bunyan, Ralegh, Lyly, and the rest write pretty much as they dress—to suit their own taste in cloth and colour. Any idiosyncrasy was flaunted; of effort to approximate to a general fashion of writing there was none. But Dryden's work suggests that he rigorously suppressed any personal preferences he may have had. His prose was designed to serve a very real and immediate purpose: that of social and political disputation; and for this end a prose ready for action, a quick-manœuvring prose, was essential. It must be straightforward, lucid, and yet graceful; attractive to men of the world rather than to scholars. The materials from which this could be made were of two kinds—the colloquial manner of Bunyan and Walton, and the elaborate manner of Lyly, Browne, and the rest. From these, with an unwavering eye on his purpose, Dryden evolved a style. Long-winded elegance was scrapped. So were those Latinisms that English had been unable to assimilate, and which so often bristled oddly in 17th-century prose. Prose could no longer afford to saunter and to flaunt its graces. It was being summoned to political action.

On the other hand, there was much in the earlier colloquial manner adaptable to this new need, much that had resisted all the attacks and slights of the Latinists so sturdily as to suggest that it was likely to be as durable as English oak. It was simple in diction, often graphic, and generally lucid. But it lacked finish: it was too like conversation to be effective in controversial essays. It must be keyed up into

a definite art form; for even the man in the street does not care to see in print the loose, untrimmed expression of every-day use. The undergrowth of classical imitation was cut away, simple diction was retained; and above all, the sentence was disciplined from its slack, ungainly habit into a measured step. In this last respect one of the most wearisome faults of the preceding prose was at last eliminated. The features of Dryden's prose are clarity, simplicity of sentence construction, fluency, and dignity: a model that soon became the standard of the 18th-century essay, and that still remains the standard of the best contemporary journalism.

One of the aptest writers in the new prose style was Sir William Temple. His essays are on such popular subjects as Gout and Gardens, and his style is that of a cultivated gentleman, careful yet undecorated; a style capable at its best of that famous passage at the end of his essay on Poetry.

VI

Other influences were at this time helping to mould the new prose. First there was the adaptation of the new style to narrative, triumphantly carried out in *Robinson Crusoe* and *Gulliver's Travels*. Defoe's contribution to English literature is too easily overlooked by modern readers, for he was a pioneer in his day. Before him, no one had written fiction convincingly. Before him, no one had written a story at that quick pace which is essential to narration. Both Defoe and Swift showed that it was possible to write a romance in unromantic language. Between them they killed the decorative make-believe that had passed for romance in Lyly and others. They lose nothing of the narrative simplicity of such predecessors as Malory; but they abandon the discursiveness and irrelevance that marked the earlier story-tellers. The story is not lost in cumbersome constructions of words, nor in those analogies and illustrations that were so irresistible to the 16th-century prosemen.

Neither Swift nor Defoe wrote sparingly. They used detail, but for a purpose; and the purpose was not to show how much they knew, but to make the tale convincing. For example, those careful inventories of Crusoe's stores, and the contents of Gulliver's pockets, are given to convince us that the story is a record of actual events. This is the consciousness of story-telling as a fine art: something new to prose narrative.

As stories, both these works have all the necessary requirements: credibility, strangeness, and convincing detail. As examples of the new prose style, they have all the qualities that mark them off from the pre-Dryden prose: manageable sentences, simple vocabulary, fluency, and relevance. In both respects they satisfy our elemental love of a well-told story; and these are the first prose tales in our literature that can do this. There is no space here to do more than note a characteristic of the new prose which can be used to measure its advance—i.e. its power to express irony. When writers begin to consider their age (and not nature or man) they perforce find it, in many respects, contemptible. Denunciation is the readiest, most obvious, manner in which to attack it; but the use of ironic comment, in which both Defoe and Swift excel, indicates a finer gift than denunciation.

Dryden, Defoe, and Swift are chiefly responsible for the malleable prose of the early 18th century, and therefore for modern prose as we know it; but there was one other considerable influence that helped to make prose flexible. This was the writing of Diaries, of which space permits the mention here of only one. Its contribution to the new style is twofold: first, it reinforces that interest in contemporary events and manners that was already the concern of Dryden, Swift, and Defoe. Secondly, such an interest is always a stimulus to vigorous writing, for where there is a really lively interest in subject-matter there will generally be a lively style. This was Pepys's gift to prose: an exuberant interest in his matter and a very companionable manner of expressing it. Pepys was not a stylist, but he had the materials as well as the manner which, with the grace of God, might have made him one.

From this point onwards, our survey will be even briefer, for English prose is definitely standardised by the beginning of the 18th century. It has secured control of its sentences, has found the meaning of rhythm, and, grammatically, has no further internal changes to make. The rest of this chapter will note merely the greatest writers; their particular felicities of expression, and any innovations that they happen to make. Many early writers have had mention whose work is definitely inferior to most of the later prose; but they were pioneers. Much more good prose was written after 1700 than before it, but many of its writers will not be mentioned here;

for from this point in English literature, style is an inheritance. Any achievement, in prose as in all things, must be measured by no absolute standard, but in relation to the handicap under which it was made.

VII

The development of the new prose proceeds along two lines : the first, through Dryden and Temple, to the Great Essayists ; the second, from Defoe and Swift to the 18th-century Novel. A fuller account of both these modes will be found in later chapters ; but here some of their chief characters of style are noted.

The Addison-Steele partnership produced the new Essay, and their contributions to *The Tatler* and *The Spectator* were a thoroughgoing survey of topics of general interest. That is to say, their subject-matter was not speculative and remote but was concerned with everyday problems and manners. Their style was fashioned like Dryden's, on the pattern of the colloquial speech used by the cultured people of the day. It had no frills or superfluities of fancy, for it had to deal, in a brief space, with an important matter ; and it had to be interesting as well as intelligible to those thousands of ordinary persons who bought the paper. These two circumstances determined the informal and intimate tone of the 18th-century Essay. The tradition that so persistently had aimed at keeping prose as near as possible to speech was now firmly established. For with Addison and Steele it was a definite literary form, consciously practised to satisfy a public demand. It was speech at its best, as seldom actually spoken, but as it would be spoken if people took care over their speech. The words were those in current conversational use. Addison's art consisted of a careful selection of appropriate words and, above all, a very perfect command of rhythm. He *marshalled* everyday speech.

Goldsmith's essay-style is immediately related to that of Steele and Addison : colloquial—but elegantly so, graceful in rhythm, and especially intimate in its mood. But not all the 18th-century essayists adopted the new style. There were those who felt that the colloquial style—even when disciplined and refined—was too like speech to be literature. Johnson was one of these. In Boswell he talks delightfully and vigorously ; but when he comes to write English himself, he adopts

a severe, constrained manner, swollen with Latinisms, that he felt was essential to writing. Here again is the revival of a tradition that had existed from the beginning of English prose. Side by side with the use of colloquial English there had been the other prose manner that was always urging itself to find a " Style " : i.e. an expression that was divorced from speech. In Johnson this point of view revived. As Arnold points out, Johnson's clumsiness, unlike that of the earlier classical stylists, was not in the construction of his sentences, which are generally as manageable as anyone's ; but in the choice of words that were remote from general understanding, or else pompous and tiresome.

Gibbon and Burke were of Johnson's persuasion ; and they conclusively show what the earlier writers of their kind of prose had not convinced us of : that English prose has room for the " grand style " as well as the colloquial. Their sentences are four-in-hands—even as the Elizabethan ones were—but driven with a sureness and precision that is a new accomplishment in our prose. They can write a long sentence that neither bolts away nor collapses in hopeless entanglements.

Through the major part of the 18th century in reaction against the riot of Elizabethan adornment, English prose had learned to be simple and homely. This lesson mastered, it once more sought adornment. But no longer does the decoration consist of hanging irrelevant imagery on to overloaded sentences. In Burke and Gibbon, colour is woven into the sense of their writing. They do not use the music of words to charm us from a confusion of thought. Their thought is compact and certain, and takes on a majestic music in the process of utterance.

A wealth of effort was put into prose development throughout the century. Dryden, Addison, Steele, and Goldsmith made colloquial speech a conscious literary form ; Johnson, Burke, and Gibbon did a similar service for the classical tradition.

VIII

The second line of development taken by the 18th-century prose was, through Defoe and Swift, to the novel. Very early in the century there was evidence that prose was feeling its way to something more than accounts of voyages or bits of philosophy. The 1611 Bible showed that English prose could tell a story swiftly and adequately. Bunyan had moments

of revelation wherein he briefly drew a character like Faithful, or such a scene as Vanity Fair. The historical sketches describe events graphically and concisely. But the germs of the novel are seen best in Defoe and Swift. Both of them possess the novelist's power of making us forget that they are writing fiction; both of them have the knack of selecting impressive detail; both can present characters who, we feel, must have lived. The *Journal of the Plague Year*, with its convincing details, even more than *Crusoe*, is evidence of Defoe's potentialities as a novelist. The book is less a diary than a selection of materials for what might have been one of the greatest historical novels. The Essayists too reveal themselves as embryo novelists. They give us Sir Roger de Coverley and Beau Tibbs to make us dream of novels that they might have written round those fascinating fellows.

The actual business of writing no longer absorbs all their energy, and this enables them to develop another of the novelist's talents: the power of getting outside himself into the skin of his characters. So, with manifest ease, Addison becomes Coverley's friend; Goldsmith, a Chinese visitor; Defoe, a shipwrecked mariner, or, better still, Moll Flanders.

These are some of the symptoms of a maturing prose. It is feeling capable of bigger things, it is hankering for an interest in humanity. Its essays constantly show this lively interest in men, but the essay is not enough. Only the novel can satisfy; and the simple, rhythmical, flexible prose that the century had attained made the novel immediately possible. In Goldsmith and Fielding this promise was realised. Fielding's interest in humanity was so broad and profound, and his capacity for expressing it so rich, that Byron called him "the prose Homer of human nature"; Goldsmith, working in a narrower field, has a no less lively and tolerant interest in men and women, and possibly a more plastic manner of expressing it.

In conclusion, the 18th century was possibly the richest epoch in the history of English prose, for before its close it had created and consolidated, in the Essay and the Novel, two new modes in English literature that proved no less successful than the Lyric and the Drama. And, no less achievement, it standardised two prose manners, the colloquial style, and the grand style.

IX

The 19th century continued both the interests and the styles of 18th-century prose. Men were still concerned with analysing the habits and thoughts of their times, still eager to set up standards of taste and of behaviour. There was a greater variety of interests in 19th-century writing than ever before; science, literature, politics, history, philosophy, each had its essayists. As for style, the duality which marked the Essay in the previous century was continued in this, but with more individual variety and mannerism. We can still trace, though faintly, the contrast between the conversational and the elaborate essay styles; between Lamb and Stevenson and Ruskin on the one hand, and Macaulay and Hazlitt on the other. But for the rest there is no classification. On close examination, we find a world of difference between Lamb's quaint manner and Ruskin's rich appeal. And into what camp can we place Carlyle, Landor, de Quincey, Shelley (in his *Defence of Poetry*)? This variety of prose manners in the essay alone indicates, above all, that prose is now sure of itself, and therefore able to express itself in as many ways as there are writers.

Lamb can successfully affect the retrospective manner, turning over his memories of cherished things long ago laid away in lavender. And with complete appropriateness he designs a style to suit his matter: a blend of the styles of earlier centuries, so that memories of the past arise to speak in the language of the past. It is by no means a copying of 17th-century style, but a very careful selection and adaptation of that style to suit the subject of the moment.

Hazlitt's is a different manner: assured, dominant, aggressive at times. He is a critic who knows,—and who believes that the world must be blustered into accepting the truth. His enthusiasm for literature compelled him to write robustly, and he could praise as wholeheartedly as he could condemn. There is a world of difference between the gentle spirit of Lamb and the virile exuberance of Hazlitt. But even when he loses his temper, he never loses command of style.

Landor's *Imaginary Conversations* show still another manner. He was a classical scholar, and preferred Latin constructions and words of Latin derivation. For this reason, he is often not easy to read with pleasure; but he has, too, the finest

qualities of the classical style: a loftiness and austerity of expression. With Lamb one can enjoy intimacy and fellowship. Landor lives apart, unapproachable, holding his readers at arm's length.

De Quincey adopted Lamb's habit—a prose reminiscent of earlier days. It is Elizabethan, with a surer rhythmic power; sustained but not involved; brilliant but never empty. The beauties of 17th-century prose—its richness of vocabulary, its embroidery, were basic in de Quincey's writing. But upon this material he worked in his own fashion, shaping it, and improving it, and, above all, adapting it to the needs of his immediate subject. He mastered his effects so carefully as to annoy Carlyle, who spoke of him as a puppet working his wires.

Leigh Hunt is of another mould still. Free and easy, often to the point of being careless in his writing, he has much of Lamb in his manner: intimacy, fluency, and charm; but he writes more readily, and so more carelessly, than Lamb. His, alone among the writing of his contemporaries, is a conversational style.

The grand style of the 18th century reappears in Macaulay: massive, elaborate, confident. He marshals armies of detail with precision and energy. He is as impressive and competent as an army commander—and as wanting in fine perceptions. He writes by the drill book. His sentences form fours briskly—they are built on one good stiff rhythm; the "eyes right" of his frequent short sentences is admirable; the "slope arms" of his parallel sentences and antitheses is perfectly carried out. But these operations become monotonous. A martinet can teach much; but English literature has a wayward charm and flexibility of manner that Macaulay can never satisfy.

This century of essayists closes with a finely contrasted pair: Carlyle and Ruskin. Of Carlyle more perhaps than of anyone is Buffon's tag true: the style is the man. The mind of the man like a whirlwind swept over all he read and heard, and carried off bits of a thousand styles into his own. Its power is volcanic. Confusion there certainly is in his writing, for an eruption cannot be orderly. It is for his broken brilliance that we read him. His style is mesmeric at its best moments, more economical than anything else in prose (as in the sketch of Mirabeau's death).

Ruskin was as earnest a prophet as Carlyle, but with a different manner. If Carlyle was John the Baptist, Ruskin was a kind of St. Paul. Their gospels had pretty much the same purpose, but Ruskin was eloquent rather than denunciatory. His account of the church of St. Mark's is as lovely a piece of writing as the century produced, and its climax—in the description of the foul rabble in the porch—shows that anger can be expressed in literature coherently as well as vigorously.

X

The novel, no less than the essay, shows a considerable advance in prose style during the 19th century. Fielding's broad tale of human affairs was continued in Scott, and with a surer command of expression. Fielding was never sure of his proportions, and still regarded the novel as the place for periodic dissertations that were irrelevant to the story. Scott departs from the path of the story only to fill in a background. His dialogue, too, has an ease and naturalness that Fielding often cannot attain.

Jane Austen, limiting her field in Goldsmith's manner, surveyed, with an insight as keen as his, the scenes of county gentility. Her writing, so subtle and delicate, has a *finish* that is an acquisition to narrative prose. Prose had already learned to control irony, but in Jane Austen it can express an elfin irony that fully tests its powers.

The novel was a powerful influence on the side of colloquial prose; for dialogue obviously had to approach closely to it, while narrative passages could only "march" by being written in brisk, easy fashion. Both Scott and Jane Austen realised this. The result was an elastic, "natural" prose that is more easily read than many parts of Fielding's more elaborate novels.

It was Dickens who consummated this progress; while Lord Lytton, a much less effective power, was illustrating in his artificial diction the very faults that the narrative style should avoid. Dickens's canvases were as large as Fielding's and Scott's, and he covered his huge areas quickly and easily. He had a hundred faults, and was by no means a master of language. Often enough he collapsed into journalese, while at other times his effort to be stylish resulted in writing as stiff and forbidding as a Victorian drawing-room full of stuffed birds and antimacassars. But he was the big compelling force

that was good for prose in his day. Others were competent to teach prose its minor lessons. He gave it broad precepts: how to tell a human story; how to use humour; how to present a coloured picture of life.

The finesse which Dickens lacked is abundantly displayed by Thackeray. His books are both better written and more easy to read than Dickens's, for he had a command of measured rhythm and perfect phrasing that Dickens seldom attained. His meaning is invariably seen through the transparent clarity of the style. Thus he masters the prime difficulty of the conversational style, which is a tendency to undisciplined periods and so to obscurity of meaning.

His method of attaining this style is peculiar; for he takes no trouble to hide the fact that he presupposes an imaginary listener whenever he is writing essay or story. To this unseen collaborator he confides the tale or the thought, and from time to time, questions or harangues him. Evidently by keeping this ghostly partner always in mind Thackeray can more easily be conversational than would be possible without a confidant. It is an odd trick, but it gives reality to the conversational manner.

His genialities are equally studied, as he admits more or less in the preface to *Pendennis*. His familiarity of manner is not the spontaneous expression of good-fellowship, but a rehearsed mannerism designed, like his conversational style, to give an air of intimacy. Goldsmith and Lamb speak directly to us. Thackeray can get no nearer than this one imaginary unit of his audience. We feel this dim figure always between the author and ourselves.

This 19th century, developing prose through essay and novel, produced this medley of styles; but the main tendencies of prose are clear enough. First, it is developing a free narrative style to suit the requirements of the Novel. It is learning to be economical and to resist the temptation to moralise over its story. Secondly, it continues the dual tradition of the Essay in two distinctive styles—one as the vehicle of philosophic, literary, and scientific criticism, the other as the free and wayward expression of individual fancy.

In all respects, during the century, prose becomes a less and less cumbersome form of expression; and instinctively keeps close to Dryden's precept by fashioning itself on the model

of English as spoken and understood by the ordinary man of culture.

XI

Of contemporary prose it may be said that, while it carries on the traditions of the past, it is experimenting with new modes, the nature of which is too varied to be dealt with here. In the novel, for example, the plain narrative style—the everyday language of ordinary people—is widely used. But some contemporaries, in their effort to be realistic, include in their vocabularies words that were formerly considered unprintable. Other novelists are experimenting in the impressionist style, and write in the fragmentary fashion—verbs missing, half-finished sentences—in which conversation in life generally takes place. And again, others anxious to create the right "atmosphere," by revealing what was going on in the minds of the actors during some incident, blend narrative with a running commentary upon, or illustration of, the psychology of the characters they are describing.

Most of the best contemporary novels, however, are written in a way that Dickens would understand—and, generally, would praise. It is a prose that handles a story more swiftly than could the Victorians, and yet can be as subtle as Jane Austen's. The prose of George Moore, Joseph Conrad, and Arnold Bennett (at his best) is as fine as that of their forerunners. It has the flexibility, sensitiveness, and adequacy of the best writers.

Equally with the new experiments and fashions in the novel, contemporary prose has been greatly affected by the rise to popularity of the Short Story. Economy is its first essential; and the necessity for seizing on the fundamentals of a situation, and for bringing the tale to a rapid climax, have fostered brevity of expression and developed the use of words to *suggest* rather than fully describe. The work of such masters as O. Henry, Kipling, Merrick, and the modern Americans, testify to the extent to which this new art is being mastered.

In the contemporary essay, which has produced some masterly prose, the familiar duality of the English essay-style is once more shown: on the one hand, the critical, didactic, and scientific manner; on the other, the intimate and confidential. An honest judgment, unblinded by conversatism, will discover a prose style comparable with Macaulay's or

Burke's or Gibbon's or Darwin's in the work of Lytton Strachey or Arthur Symons ; and a style scarcely inferior to that of Lamb and Goldsmith and Stevenson in the essays of W. H. Hudson, Max Beerbohm, Chesterton, Belloc, E. V. Lucas, A. A. Milne, and Robert Lynd.

The increase in the number of periodicals, and the rapid development of journalism, have also had considerable influence on present-day writing. Journalese is a sickness that is harmful to good prose, but there are many journals that are inoculated against the disease. The leading dailies and weekly reviews offer opportunities to the best essayists to publish their work ; and the better class of story magazines have placed the Short Story under no less an obligation, by giving it scope to make itself an adequate literary form.

CHAPTER IX

THE ESSAY

I

IT is often forgotten that Elizabethan England produced more than drama. The last chapter indicated that prose passed through many significant phases during that astonishing period, and enriched our literature by such remarkably various works as the *Authorized Version*, *Euphues*, and Bacon's *Essays*.

Bacon's contribution was not one of style only, but of a form quite new to English literature. Something comparable in many respects to his *Essays* had been produced in France by Montaigne; but it is fairly safe to conclude, from what we know of Bacon generally, that his essay-form was an independent conception.

Its origin with him appears to have been partly accidental. Every thinker in some measure contracts the habit of crystallising his conclusions in pithy aphorisms, which serve him as the steps cut in ice on a glacier serve the climber: they are the most economical and yet the most adequate stages to the summit of his thinking. Bacon was an acute and original thinker, who possessed this habit of noting conclusions in brief. Many of them were, no doubt, the result of discussion and conversation, just as many were entirely the conclusions of his own independent thought. The first group of what he called his "Essays"—a name that very clearly suggests their tentative nature—were put forth by Bacon in no confident mood, for he regarded them simply as fragmentary contributions to speculation on themes of general interest. For Bacon the *Essays* had a very distinct moral purpose. Their subject-matter was more or less of a popular nature. "They come home," Bacon says, "to men's businesse and bosomes"; and are indeed often potted sermons on man's duty to self, to society, and to God. Now such a subject-matter as this

largely determines the style of the Essay. It must be attractive yet authoritative; brief, and withal illuminating. All these essentials Bacon secures. His conclusions on Truth, Empire, Friendship, etc., have the deliberate certainty that we associate with the pulpit. Their brevity is the result of a fining-down process which produces admirably terse phrases that read like proverbs or axioms. And the essays, short as they are, reveal the Elizabethan power of vivid but homely phrasing: as when the ill-natured man is likened to "the thorn or briar, which prick or scratch because they can do no other." Bacon often relies, again in the pulpit manner, upon apt, convincing anecdote.

Such was the original type of English Essay: and later practice leaves Bacon's style unique in the history of the essay; so much so that it is questionable whether we really should date our essay-form from him. His discovery of a simple, expressive prose-style—so completely different from the heavily decorated manner of his contemporaries—was a lead that others readily followed; but his essay is a form that has had no imitator. Of its nature, it was bound to be unique—because it is a minimum expression. It could be easily imitated, as the reader can well convince himself by attempting to copy one; it is *too easily imitated.* There is no means whereby a disciple could make any mark of his own on the copy; and for that reason it has no attraction for a writer: it leaves no scope for his individuality.

II

Bacon's essay-form was a powerful influence on prose; but the essay as we know it to-day owes little to him. In his own century, however, other essayists wrote in a manner that resembles his. Sir William Temple, for example, wrote brief homilies on popular subjects, but he "spread himself" in a way Bacon never did. This simple fact accounts for the different tone of his essays. If you are abrupt you cannot be familiar. Space is in this sense what Time is in human relationships. If you have plenty of time to spend with a new acquaintance you may well become intimate. If you have space in which to write, you have, what Bacon never had, the opportunity to be companionable. This is the chief feature of Temple's essays: a pleasant, pliable manner that grows in confidence as the essay develops; a feature

that has since become the most distinctive mark of the essay.

The growing flexibility of prose that made possible a greater variety of manners made it possible, and eventually easy, to express oneself in a familiar and friendly mood. As prose bends, so do its writers unbend.

III

The growing possibilities of prose during the 17th century were responsible for a new kind of literary exercise. This was the writing of short sketches known as " Characters " : pen-pictures of persons, or, to be more exact, of types made up from generalisations of persons actually seen and known by the writers.

There is no better material for the beginner in composition than the description of things seen. Early poetry described the visible world, early prose told tales of men and things; and although Overbury, Earle, and the other 17th-century character-writers had no conscious intention of developing and extending the essay-form of Bacon and Temple, yet it was their introduction into the essay's subject-matter of these sketches from life which determined the subsequent scope of the essay. Their essays are studies of the Yeoman, the Clown, the Poet, the " Mere Young Gentleman of the University," the " Plodding Student," and so on ; and however much they tend to become over-generalised, they have their basis in actual observation.

So far, then, two strains exist in that kind of short prose exercise that for convenience we call the 17th-century Essay : the reflective and the descriptive. It was still an undetermined literary form, but these two influences remain predominant throughout its later development.

IV

Great literature has never been inspired by the tag about Art for Art's sake. Literature is not a luxury, but a necessity ; and when the people demand it, the writers produce it. So came the Ballad and the Drama. And when Londoners in the early 18th century showed such a lively interest in journalism, the Essay became a successful and popular literary mode.

Too often Journalism is adversely judged, or rather, summarily condemned, because of the offences of its worst

practitioners. But it is obvious that Journalism is entirely responsible not only for the sudden perfection of the essay in the first years of the 18th century, but also for its high accomplishment in the 19th and 20th. Before the close of the 18th century there were nearly sixty daily or weekly journals publishing in London; and most of them, besides giving the important news, printed a short article of criticism or belles lettres. The most famous of the journals was of course *The Spectator*, and it was the most thoroughgoing, for it excluded news entirely. Each issue consisted of an essay whose purpose was sometimes to instruct in matters of taste, sometimes to criticise contemporary life and manners, and sometimes to entertain its readers with a sketch written in the style of the earlier "Character."

Addison and Steele, in fact, gave a charter to the Essay, making it free of every domain of subject-matter; and this prescriptive right the essayist retains to-day. In the middle-page articles of the leading weeklies, or the leaders of the great dailies, the contemporary essayist takes full advantage of his privilege. Since Addison and Steele removed the fences that Bacon unwittingly set up around the subject-matter of the essay, there have been no limits to its range of interest.

The Tatler and *The Spectator* gave two other endowments to the essay. The first was an essay-mood or atmosphere; the second, a style. Temple and Cowley, differing from Bacon, had given some play to an intimacy of manner that, among some of the lesser essayists like Jeremy Collier, had become unpleasing familiarity. Addison and Steele were true to the best Dryden tradition; indeed, they softened it and humanised it. Their manner is the easy and companionable kind one would use to a circle of congenial acquaintances, never degenerating into false heartiness.

Johnson's advice to those who are trying to acquire a style, to give days and nights to Addison, is another of the old bear's erratic judgments, but it indicates the extent of Addison's influence on the style of his time. His capacity for taking pains is shown in his careful paragraphing, his neat sense of balance and antithesis, and his frequent epigrammatic precision. Propriety is the predominating quality of his work; an immaculate sentence construction, a diction that is never unusual and never too colloquial, a discreet use of imaginative

illustration, and a rather prim but faintly effective humour. Johnson might better have said, "Give your days to Addison, and your nights to Steele"; for Steele has that fervour of utterance whose absence leaves Addison's work sometimes a trifle anæmic.

V

Johnson and Goldsmith are associated for many reasons; but as essayists they are poles apart. Goldsmith, in spite of his errant nature, was a traditionalist; Johnson was the innovator. They wrote their essays in the periodicals of the middle 18th century—*The Rambler*, *The Idler*, *The Bee*—journals which followed more or less the aim of *The Tatler* and *The Spectator*. Goldsmith kept pretty closely to the pattern which originated with Addison and Steele, but one or two distinctive features of his work should be noted.

(1) His character-sketches are written from a novelist's angle. They are not so rounded-off as Addison's, not so complete in themselves. Such essays as "A Visit to Vauxhall" illustrate this. There is a lack of proportion due to the novelist's sudden access of interest in his character—a spontaneous interest, that makes him pause to develop some detail of character or dialogue; but at the same time, his occasional caress of a situation or character atones for this loss of symmetry.

(2) Goldsmith's style is altogether the most elastic that so far had been used by the essayists. He can write passages (as, for example, in "A City Night Piece") that are as careful and formal as Addison's most painstaking work; and, on the other hand, he can fall into a racy anecdotal manner which is more supple than anything in *The Spectator*. What is more interesting still, he can switch effortlessly from the one to the other of these styles; he never loses mastery of the easy manner. The degree of difference between Goldsmith and Addison, both in temperament and experience, is reflected in this difference of style. Goldsmith has the mellower, more tolerant, and human manner; he has less reserve and a readier humour. Addison will receive you with generous courtesy, but only when he is dressed and powdered. Goldsmith will let you in before breakfast, and talk to you in his dressing-gown.

VI

Most of Bacon's essays, many of Addison's, and scarcely any of Goldsmith's, were didactic. Later practice in the essay-form proceeded along each of these two paths; the one anxious to inform, or to give a definite lead of opinion on some matter, the other eager to entertain or to charm.

As a literary form, the second type is the more distinctive, for the didactic essay frequently belongs as much to science, or history, or biography, as to literature. In so far as they deal in a formal subject-matter, didactic essays cannot share those traits of character and temperament that are revealed in the other kind of essay. The "intimate" essay is a kind of prose lyric, developing, in a purely subjective manner, some turn of thought or play of fancy, that has nothing to do with knowledge as such.

Dryden's *Essay on Dramatic Poetry* was an early example of this former kind, and Johnson's *Lives of the Poets* were more definite efforts in the same line. But the cleavage between the "pure" or non critical and the critical essay was most clearly marked in the 19th century. *The Edinburgh Review* and *The Quarterly Review* were established for the specific purpose of religious, political, and literary criticism. A little later two magazines were founded, *Blackwood's* and *The London*, part of whose policy was to print non-critical essays. Thereafter, there is always a clear separation of the two kinds of essay.

Of the critical essayists the chief were Hazlitt and Macaulay. The features of their style were indicated in a previous chapter; but here we may note how their subject-matter determined that style. Their purpose was to convey opinion or knowledge. They had to write *as if* they knew, whether they did or not: the result is a platform manner that has nothing informal about it. Further, they had to be terse and logical: their essential qualities are precision of thought, clearness of phrase, and an authoritative manner.

Carlyle has one foot in each essay school. He was a critic of history, philosophy, and literature, but he used a style that is as personal to himself as that of any of the "pure" essayists. He showed very successfully, in fact, that it was possible to be didactic, and yet free from a stereotyped, professorial manner: and his example has been followed by many later critical essayists like Ruskin and Pater.

VII

The didactic essay, or "paper," is a lesser channel of the essay-form; and even during the 19th century it was the non-critical or "literary" essay which left the deepest mark on non-narrative prose. Goldsmith had won a place in literature for the fancy-free style of the informal essay. Lamb consolidated its claim. He practised a kind of essay which is best described as the prose complement of the lyric, or rather, perhaps, of the ode. In an earlier chapter some illustrations were given to show how a certain subject-matter, considered by a variety of personalities, evokes a similar variety of lyrical ecstasy. Lamb and the "literary" essayists, working in the less sublime but more extensive medium of prose, react in a similar way to their subject-matter. A first view of an antique town, or the sound of church bells on a winter morning, releases from delicate sensibilities a flood of memories and fancies. The *subject* is of secondary importance: it is the gust of wind which sets ringing the thousand bits of glass that hang from the ridges of an oriental temple. Free from the strain of plot and characterisation, the essay can discover to its readers those "little things"—the whims, fancies, and turns of thought—which best reveal a personality.

It may (quite wrongly) be imagined that the "literary" essay, so strongly responsive to its writer's momentary mood, tends therefore to be an inconsequential farrago of fancy. The critical essay, it may be thought, developing an argument, must be logically set forth; while the other kind will be invertebrate and without design. An examination of Lamb's essays will destroy this mistaken notion. The Labyrinth of Gnossos is nothing but a maze to Theseus until he gets hold of the thread of silk that guides him to Ariadne. The thread of silk is there in each of Lamb's most labyrinthine essays.

Take, for example, *The Praise of Chimney Sweepers*. The essay begins with a panegyric to the "matin lark"—the young sweep. Immediately afterwards, Lamb is recalling the thrill he felt as a boy when he saw a sweep's brush suddenly emerge from a chimney-top. The fifth paragraph is a parenthetic exhortation to the reader to give a penny to a sweep when he sees one. In the next paragraph, the maze takes what seems an incomprehensible turn, for it does nothing but describe a shop which sells sassafras tea; but soon we discover

that this is the favourite beverage of sweeps. Then the essay takes a fresh turn, to mention those other stalls where the early workman gets his herbal beer. The following paragraph comes back to the sweep at the stall, where you are invited to stand him a drink and a snack. There we come into a new section of the maze, which begins most disconcertingly : " I am by nature extremely susceptible of street affronts," but which leads us on to consider the mischievous nature of sweeps. No sooner do we feel our way along than we come across a fresh and startling line : " I am by theory obdurate to the seductiveness of what are called, a fine set of teeth,"—but it directs us eventually to a consideration of the possibility that many sweeps are mislaid lordlings. We are led on to a pleasant story of one such romance. On the heels of that, we are without warning introduced to " my pleasant friend, Jem White," who however turns out to be a kind of patron saint of sweeps. One of his annual feeds for them is next described ; and, just afterwards, we emerge unexpectedly to find that, Jem now dead, the sweeps lament his lost bounty.

From first to last the thread is there, and the shocks we get as we fancy ourselves lost from time to time, serve to heighten our pleasure at the constant return to the central idea.

Of this nature, as the student may find for himself, is the work of those modern essayists who follow the " pure " essay tradition : Stevenson, Jefferies, W. H. Hudson, Max Beerbohm, Chesterton, Robert Lynd, and E. V. Lucas. The essayist makes any approach he prefers, and pleases himself as to what turns his maze shall take. But a bird's-eye view of it reveals always a definite unity from first to last.

Most of the other characteristics of Lamb are shared, too, by the later essayists. The essay affords full scope for idiosyncrasy (Lamb's was a liking for the turns of phrase of Sir Thomas Browne and his fellows : G. K. Chesterton's is a mediæval zest for an extravagant phrase). It is the happy hunting ground of the whimsical fellows, who looking at life from odd angles, show us the wonder and drollness of it.

CHAPTER X

THE NOVEL

I

"NOVEL" and "Fiction" are not properly synonymous terms at all, for the former is no more than an exercise in fiction. Fiction is a material, Novel a method of treatment. Fiction begins when people start to trifle with facts; and one's first untruth is an essay in fiction.

It is clear, then, that the origins of the novel are laid very far back in the history of humanity, for as soon as story-telling began, the first step was taken towards the novel. The minstrel and the ballad-maker, who based their stories on the facts of history, were early writers of fiction; for fiction is a kind of "re-assembling of the parts" of history. History has no beginning and no end; but the story must have both. History is altogether too unwieldy and extensive for the story-teller's purpose. So he selects events and characters out of the big world and extended time in which they were, in fact, set, and puts them in a smaller, more comprehensible setting. In doing so, as a jeweller breaks up his stones to make a brooch, he chips off bits of events, or recuts historical characters, to fit them into the setting he has designed. That was the earliest kind of fiction, and is well illustrated in *Beowulf*. Many things in the story may very possibly be actual facts, but they have been drawn closer and reshaped and added to from the writer's own mind.

The minstrels of the Middle Ages in England selected their stories almost exclusively from the quasi-historical accounts of the deeds of such figures as King Arthur and Charlemagne. Their method throws some light on the possibilities of fiction; for, to suit their audiences, they combined the high romantic tale with matter that was strictly irrelevant to the story. That is, they divined the importance of "relief" and atmos-

phere—and, too, of comedy (consisting very often of crude jests at the expense of the mediæval church).

Chaucer carried the development a big step forward; for he not only relates a good story, but takes pains to make his fictitious characters more acceptable to common sense than were most of the fantastic heroes of minstrel romance. More than that, in the Canterbury Tales he showed that fiction writers need no longer depend on the foreign inheritance for their material, but could fashion their stories from the scenes and events of their own day.

The Printing Press made prose possible in England; and prose in its infancy was nourished on fiction. Of the early prose narrative writers Malory illustrates the steady march towards the novel. First and foremost, he has a good story to tell. Secondly, it is, on the whole, a credible story. Thirdly, there is in *Morte d'Arthur* a distinct interest in characterisation; and, lastly, there is a strong personal colouring to the story, a mark of individual authorship that a mere historical narrative could never have. He makes his figures human: his heroes capable of weakness, and the villains capable of bravery. They move, too, in a world which is coming closer to actuality, and which in many respects is similar to the world which first read Malory.

But Romance connotes a life that was fast fading in the next hundred years, and the gap between fiction and the lives of those who were reading it did not lessen. This was mainly Caxton's fault, for with his zeal for translation he restricted fiction to renderings into English prose of French mediæval romances; and these at their best had a remoteness that grew more and more unsatisfying to the readers of prose. The bridge that spanned the gap was the Novel, and the skill that made it was learned in Italy where Boccaccio had long since established the popularity of his prose tales of contemporary life. Lyly's *Euphues* was an experiment in the mode already popular in Italy and its qualities may be briefly summarised here.

It is a novel in the sense that it attempts to relate a prose story; and it follows the Italian fashion of portraying the manners of the day rather than the sensational fables of yesterday. The hero's adventures, that is to say, are social instead of military. There is an effort made to extract interest from the contemporary world rather than from some preceding

golden age of warfare and romance. There is, too, in the book the further purpose that has since come to be regarded as the legitimate business of the novelist : criticism of the manners of the day.

But *Euphues* illustrates many of the faults that later practice avoids. These consist of impediments to the actual narrative ; and the two chief are, a tiresome antithetic and alliterative style, whose ornateness throttles sense ; and a persistent wandering from the story into by-paths of classical allusion. This latter habit at once raises the question, How far may the novelist wander from his story ? And the answers that have proved sound are : He may wander (1) with the deliberate purpose of holding up the story by the device of suspense, so as to sharpen our interest. But the suspense must not last too long. (2) For the purpose of drawing the background or creating the atmosphere that his scenes demand. (3) To allow himself space for a brief Olympian comment on the antics of his puppets.

II

After Lyly there were several stages that hastened the 18th-century novel. Before the novel could hope to carry out its particular function of portraying humanity it had to learn to describe in detail men and women and the actual world they lived in. Much of the prose of the 17th century was used for this " rehearsal." There are the " Characters " mentioned in the last chapter ; there are vivid descriptive passages in the Bible, and in *The Pilgrim's Progress*, and in the works of the essayists ; there are the sharp, clear sketches of the Diarists : all competent, often brilliant, exercises in description and characterisation.

The climax of these " first steps to the novel " is *Robinson Crusoe*. As a novel it has limitations, and does not satisfy the demand that we make of the novelist that he must be not only a creator of his world, but an *omniscient* creator. He must fashion people and ordain their movements, but he must also know their feelings and reactions. The realists, of whom Defoe is the first to write a novel, excel at the creation of men and things (in so far as they draw them accurately from life), but they neglect the analysis of motive and emotion which is necessary to make the study of humanity complete and satisfying. The novel is more than a story ; it is a story

with an accompaniment. And the accompaniment is the revelation of the mental and spiritual convictions of those who are caught in the action of the story, the revelation of their attitude to their environment and their fate. To this accompaniment the story stands somewhat as the libretto of an opera does to its music. There are as few possible story plots as there are librettos: but the possibilities of accompaniment are infinite.

The failure of the realists is more or less that of Fielding's. Crusoe lives, but never reacts; Fielding narrates, but never attains that imaginative height from whence the novelist can, like a god, survey with full comprehension and pity the beings of his creation. But the realist method, as *Crusoe* amply shows, gives full scope for clear and impressive detail.

Defoe's greatest book raises a further point of technical interest. In whose name shall the story be told? The answer which the novelist gives to this question depends, of course, upon his purpose; and when that purpose is to depict realism, Defoe's method in *Robinson Crusoe* has a clear advantage over other methods. At the same time, there are certain obvious limitations in this manner of telling the story. The narrator in the first person cannot assume that omniscience which the author could exercise if he told the story in the third person. He has, for example, no knowledge of events which may happen elsewhere, and which may have a bearing on his own situation; his insight into the motives of the other characters must inevitably be less complete than that of the Olympian third person who can survey every motive as well as every scene; nor is he able to give, save by his actions, a truthful impression of his own personality.

On the other hand, if the narrative is given to the chief character to unfold, it acquires the credibility of an actual chronicle; and the limitations mentioned above may paradoxically help to give this effect. The fact that the narrator knows no more than we do of to-morrow gives a circumstantial flavour to every surprise event. And further, though the narrator cannot throw much direct light on his own nature, yet we may learn a good deal of his personality by observing his behaviour under cunningly chosen conditions. *Robinson Crusoe* very interestingly illustrates all of these points.

Defoe's novel of realism was a brilliant flash in the pan. The next important novel so completely ignores his pattern

as to make it evident that Richardson was, to himself at any rate, the discoverer of a new prose form. The truth seems to be that fiction bore twins in the early 18th century. The first was interested purely in things seen; the second testified to the growing interest, reflected in all the prose of the late 17th and the early 18th centuries, in people's behaviour and habits. The first was the Realist Romantic novel; the second, the Sentimental novel. The first looks away from contemporary life, the second looks into it.

The realist novel is under the spell of Romance, for it is still remote from the actual experiences and emotions of every-day people. It presents a world which, though it be as bare and unenviable as Crusoe's island, is none the less of the same stuff as those wonderlands which early fiction described. Richardson uses fiction for a new purpose, which is more immediate to the lives of his readers. His scenes are those of common experience and his people are of his own time. The region he surveyed was the small but significant one of the human heart; and the purpose of his survey was to reveal the feelings and the motives of people as they are manifested in the daily routine of their lives.

It is not easy for us who are so used to this kind of novel to appreciate Richardson's daring in presenting such a story as that of the poor but honest domestic servant, who preserves her virtue in this workaday world and thereby wins a happy marriage. The success of his work shows that Romance was outworn and that there was a real general interest in this analysis of everyday life and experience.

Richardson never attained a mastery of this difficult business of analysing mind and heart. The danger which this kind of novel incurs—as witness not only *Clarissa* and *Pamela*, but the psycho-analytical novel of to-day—is of tangling its story in a mesh of tedious detail. To give a lucid exposition of a mental state is for the best writer a difficult matter; and the novice, like Richardson, over-anxious to make sure that one really understands what was happening, elaborates this explanation to a wearisome length. The story, therefore, drifts very sluggishly along. Johnson's rebuke to those whose love of a story wilts under Richardson's excessive interest in sentimental scrutiny, was surely unjustified. The novelist's main duty is to give us a life story telescoped into a few hundred pages. As a substitute for this slice of life, sentiment

is no more effective than is the disembodied grin for the Cheshire Cat.

Richardson originated a vogue of presentment as well as of subject-matter, by unfolding the story through a series of *letters* exchanged between the characters. Against its one advantage—its suitability for that sharing of intimate heart secrets which is essential in this kind of novel—this method has several disabilities. It deprives the story of actuality; for, even in the palmiest days of letter-writing, such voluminous correspondence as that which passes in *Pamela* and the other novels would be very unlikely. The style of the letters, too, strengthens the suggestion of artificiality, for they are couched in language evidently beyond the attainment of Pamela.

In spite of the handicap of his analytic method, Richardson manages to give his novels that first essential of all good writing—unity. There must be unity in the story: every minor event must flow into the central channel. There must be unity in the characterisation, so that from first to last one person or group holds the middle of the stage, and behaves consistently with its nature. Events happen because the characters are what they are, and the novelist must make his men and women before he gives them a world to act in. Once made, they must be consistent to themselves—save in those inconsistencies that are a relief to everyone's behaviour—and act, not perhaps wisely, but credibly. If they are soundly fashioned they may be placed in selected circumstances that will clearly reveal the nature the novelist means them to have. There must be in them a unity that moulds each of their actions and thoughts into a convincing image of humanity. Thus Crusoe, though at first only lightly sketched, is fully realised. He is a brave, resourceful, God-fearing mariner. And the rest of the book keeps that unity clearly before us. The events have a similar unity, for each is chosen for the sake of revealing further Crusoe's character. So event and character react upon each other in that one unity whose purpose is to present a credible picture of a human being.

Richardson's methods are different from Defoe's, but in spite of the difficulties already mentioned he manages to give this essential unity to his novels. Pamela holds the stage from the first, and, very slowly, is shown as a person of a definite and consistent character. So well does Richardson do this

that he creates, for modern readers, a character who is actually different from the one he intended her to be. To him she is a morally-immaculate, modest damsel; to us, a designing little baggage. This paradox is the tribute to Richardson's method; for he built up a character *in spite of* his own pious intention.

There are many reasons why we smile at a document like Pamela's Letter VII. Not even the best of modern best-sellers (of whom Richardson is the patron saint) could carry mawkish sentiment to so extreme a length. The sub-title of *Pamela*—"Virtue Rewarded"—reads like a parody, and there are many other occasions when Richardson blunders in his dissection of such a delicate organ as the human heart. But these faults are the inevitable price of experiment. In his interests and in his technique Richardson was an innovator; and, if his technique has never been useful for general purposes, his first attempt at the novel of sentiment established a tradition that is to-day the chief inspiration of the novel. In what respects that tradition had to be radically amended will be shown in the next section.

III

Fielding carried Richardson's method into a wider practice, but he, too, aimed at depicting life as it is actually lived. He, too, set out to describe human motive and behaviour as he found them in common life. Fielding was not quite sure what he was doing, though he felt that his method was new to prose; but from the first he knew what was wrong with Richardson. He saw first that Richardson's view of life was wrong: that it was much too narrow and much too solemn. This question of attitude is very relevant indeed to the study of literary craftsmanship, most especially in such modes as Drama and Novel, where so much depends upon characterisation. If the writer looks undiscerningly upon Life he produces characters who cannot live, whose actions are incredible, and whose story therefore has no human interest. Richardson, for example, began with the idea that virtue is rewarded in this world—an evidently false attitude. Fielding had a saner view of the world, and for the benefit of the audience who had witnessed the false emotions of Pamela, he wrote *Joseph Andrews*. In this book he stands poor Richardson on his head, and shows him the quaint spectacle of a virtuous footman

harried by a designing mistress, and so reduced the sentimental novel to an absurdity. In his preface he describes his method as Epic Comedy, since "no critic hath thought proper to range it under another head, or to assign it a particular name to itself." What, for convenience, he called a prose Epic Comedy is the novel of sentiment written by a humorist.

Fielding has a comic vision of society. "Life," he says, "everywhere furnishes the accurate observer with the ridiculous"; and "the ridiculous" he defines as the antics of persons who are either vain or hypocritical (an attitude curiously like that of Mr. Bernard Shaw). It is his view of Society that separates Fielding from Richardson. It is the epic view of humanity on the big scale. But whereas the epic tragedy presents the heroic side of the medal, the epic comedy shows the ridiculous. (There is some significance in the inference that the tragic epic is the province of verse and the comic epic that of prose.)

Fielding's own name for this new novel explains his method of composition as well as that of such later writers of the prose epic as Dickens and Thackeray. Epic was a happy description of Fielding's method. In the first place he worked on the epic scale. That does not mean simply that he wrote long novels. He got more into his novels than Richardson did; a wider scope, a host of people, a variety of incident. The Epic Tragedy bars persons of mean origin. The heroes are semi-mythological characters who would therefore at once transgress the first law of the novel—credibility. Fielding does for epic what Shakespeare did for drama—permits all sorts and conditions of men to live in his world: a world where no gods walk and where tea-drinking is permissible. His Epic Comedy, in brief, helps literature to be a truer mirror of life. His particulars become representative of all humanity. Tom Jones, no less than Ulysses, is the Universal Man. Ulysses in his unheroic hours and Tom Jones in his heroic ones would have been indistinguishable.

From what has been said it is evident that Fielding's greatest power was in the portrayal of characters. (He himself testifies that all of them are drawn from life.) If the reader has ever tried to draw a horse from life he will understand that studies from the life are the hardest. It is one thing to have known Parson Adams or Squire Western; and another to bring them to life, as Fielding did. His method

of characterisation is utterly different from and far better than Richardson's. He never lingers over his figures with the jealous concern of a psychologist, elaborately explaining their mental processes, and finally getting them to display some signs of life. Fielding presents them briefly but vividly at the outset, in the setting they occupy in life, and thereafter his persons speak for themselves.

In the second place, his manner of narration reinforces his characterisation. The novel of letters gives little scope for action, and it is *in action* that characters reveal themselves most clearly, if not most meticulously. Fielding narrates the story himself, i.e. in the third person, and so can select those incidents which can in fact reveal more of a man's character to us than we should ever discover from a score of his own letters, or from the minutest abstract analysis of his mind.

Finally, Fielding has the epic power of structure. Such a story as *Tom Jones*, ranging as it does over by-plots, and suspended by the frequent invocations, yet retains its unity. The invocations are perhaps Fielding's sop to the Epic Style which he was attempting to transfer from verse to prose, yet they should not be skimmed by the modern reader, although that perhaps will enable him to see more clearly still the masterly sense of unity which from first to last prevents any part of the story from submerging its hero.

Smollett attempted to carry on Fielding's method, and however less capable he was than Fielding, he had the right ideas about making a novel. A novel, he said, must have "a principal personage to unite the incidents, and unwind the clue of the labyrinth." This recognition of the fundamental necessity of unity following upon the careful organisation of plot by Richardson and Fielding, set up a canon for the novel that later novelists took care to observe. It is the backbone of all novel-writing.

Smollett follows Fielding too in his power of vivid characterisation, and derives it from the same source—observation of life at first hand. His best figures are the reproductions of those he lived with during his voyages at sea as a surgeon: the original Tom Bowling from *Roderick Random*, and Hawser Trunnion from *Peregrine Pickle*. Not only did he work up into novels the people he had met long before he contemplated literature; but he was the innovator of a practice that is almost universal with novel-writers to-day: the habit of

travelling definitely to secure " local colour." So he reinforces another of the precepts of his predecessors by making his novels a fictional arrangement or adaptation of things seen and experienced in actual life.

IV

Irishmen have a trick of making unexpected appearances in English literature, and their sudden descents invariably liven things up. They generally lack education, and often transgress literary principles, but they contribute a quality that we have come to depend on for the reinvigoration of our literature.

Sterne and Goldsmith have far less skill in novel construction than their three forerunners : Tristram Shandy himself never materialises in the story where we expect him to be the " principal personage " ; and Goldsmith is never happy with his plot in *The Vicar of Wakefield.* Both Sterne and Goldsmith are capable of such brilliant characterisation as Uncle Toby, and the pathetic Vicar. Besides this, they each contribute a distinctive blend of humour to story-telling. In both blends the basic ingredient is sentiment : a ready response to emotion, never watered to Richardson's sentimentality. But, with this, Sterne mixes a herb that is more characteristically Irish than the shamrock. (Mr. Bernard Shaw is the apothecary of our own day who mixes the same pungent draught.) Sterne has the trick of laughing when we expect him to be serious, and of being solemn at the right moment. He is the irresponsible druggist, who mixes the bottles of laughter and tears. Goldsmith's sentiment is mixed only with a sweet tincture of humour, never bitter, never satirical.

In the matter of construction these two are inferior to those who went before ; as sketchers from life, they are brilliant ; and in the difficult art of handling sentiment they succeed as completely as Richardson failed.

V

Towards the end of the 18th century there was an uneasiness about the novel ; a restlessness which, in Poetry, culminated in the Romantic Revival of sensuous poetry. No matter how we label the periods of literature, as Classical, Romantic, Realist, Sentimental, and so on, the truth is that literature (in so far as it is an expression of life) needs change. *Euphues*

was remote, and begot a craving for the novel of *real* life. By the end of the century, people were less satisfied with pictures of the world as they knew it, and hankered for the strange, remote, and exotic. At the end of the 18th century the romance story reappeared in some force ; and though it must be included in the title " novel," it must have a prefix. It does not pretend to be credible, any more than that considerable section of the fiction of to-day which deals with sheiks and mystery murders. Its whole effect lies in its power to be incredible.

It is easy to take up a superior attitude towards those readers of fiction who are so bored with the commonplaces of life that they need the anodyne of hectic romance. It is easy to tell the butcher's boy that his life is really as interesting in its way as that of any pirate's apprentice. He won't believe it. The truth is that it is infinitely harder to see any of that quality we call romance in our own kind of life than in the life of those who lived in earlier, more picturesque days. The errand boy's Odyssey on a bicycle through dangerous traffic may appear a knightly quest—to anyone but the errand boy. Jaded by the commonplace we grow into a lethargy which only extreme shock can dispel, an operation that in the theatre is performed by the Grand Guignol thrillers, and in fiction by the red-blooded " shockers."

The best early examples of the latter are Horace Walpole's *Castle of Otranto*, Mrs. Radcliffe's *Udolpho*, and Maturin's *The Fatal Revenge*. The Novel of Terror owes this much to the romantic revival, that it looked to the past for inspiration ; yet the prose expression of the revival of the " spirit of wonder " is an odd complement to its poetic expression in Shelley and Keats.

Walpole's method was to remove fiction from the environment of realistic everyday life which Fielding and the others had used, and set it in mediæval surroundings. At the same time, he meant to keep as close to the characters and conversations of real life as the 18th-century novel in general did. As a matter of fact, his supernatural setting was simply decorative and did not act (as Walpole had intended it to) as a mirror wherein would be reflected the emotions of the characters. Walpole points out with great discernment that Shakespeare had previously done this, that his people were generally Elizabethans, that they spoke like Elizabethans,

but that they were given an impressiveness by being set in an Egyptian palace, or in an Athenian wood, or on a sea-coast in Bohemia. But where Shakespeare succeeded Walpole and his followers fail, because of their unchecked exuberance. Their settings do violence to character and conversation ; they use the supernatural excessively ; and, simply and finally, they are not Shakespeares.[1]

Mrs. Radcliffe was a more successful shocker than Walpole. She was partial to sentiment, and she realised that the heroines in the " popular " novel must invariably be virtuous. The hero must be generous (" to a fault "), wayward, and handsome. Villains must always be forbidding fellows, and as darkly coloured as it is possible for Europeans to be. Another trick that she practised (over a century before the vogue of " best-sellers ") was that of holding her readers in a sweet agony of suspense while Emily in " the dim obscurity of her chamber " thinks of the awful Count of Morano. She has again another device learned by our contemporary shockers —the facility of padding out the story with very adjectival descriptions of nature. She does her best, too, to be independent of the absolute supernatural, refusing to be indebted to either god or devil, and attempting to explain each abnormal situation by some natural cause. Altogether Mrs. Radcliffe should be the patron saint of that legion of fiction manufacturers who in our own day use precisely her methods to make us forget our drab lives in the make-believe of impossible romances. Like them, she has her credible moments.

VI

We have seen that the Novel of Terror was an attempt to associate fiction with the broad movement of the Romantic Revival : an attempt that failed for want of restraint. Prose is less capable of the high emotional power which supernatural treatment requires. Poetry can carry off such improbabilities as those of *The Ancient Mariner* because it can soar, because it has a pitch of emotion that makes the story almost incidental. Prose, relying on story, is badly let down at the moment of acutest improbability.

The novel found a safer road back to Romance through

[1] Cp. the very brilliant modern exercise in this difficult medium, Ernest Brahmah's *Kai-Lung's Golden Hours :* a parable of to-day in a Chinese setting.

History, and was able to present a world that was both credible and remote. The master of the historical method was Scott, and his first masterpiece was *Waverley*.

It is significant that Scott's first novels were made from the history of his own country. If he could not describe, as Fielding and Smollett had done, the actual people whose lives he had known and shared, he did the next best thing: described events and people that were familiar to him through his study of history. And moreover, his first-hand knowledge of Scottish scenes and Scottish types was grafted into the history to make the novels seem wonderfully like the record of things seen and undergone by the author himself.

Scott's weaknesses are often excused on the ground that he was compelled for economic reasons to write hurriedly; but that fails to account for some of his faults. Let it be admitted that they are constitutional defects. They illustrate once again the importance to the novelist of drawing upon experience for his characters. Scott's heroes and heroines are types taken from the old ballads and romances, and tricked out by a deficient imagination. They are the pale, aloof, conventional figures of mediæval chivalry. In their appropriate dress (which Scott carefully provides) they look well enough; but they speak and behave like the puppets they are. His humbler people, on the other hand, made from types which Scott had known and seen, are absolute successes. The scenes, too, are not the canvas castles of Otranto, but places that are described with all the colour and vigour that familiarity with them can give. In the later novels Scott had no such first-hand matter to work upon; and *Ivanhoe* and *The Talisman* have an artificial appearance from which the Scottish stories are always free. His power of vivid narration covers the defects to a great extent; but the scenes and the persons in the foreign romances are never as convincing as those in *The Antiquary* and *Old Mortality*.

His stories, whether Scottish or not, established the vogue of the historical novel, and his method remains the only effective one. He never attempts the impossible task of giving an air of reality to history by trying to revive dry bones. It is comparatively easy to rebuild or restore the castles of lost ages, but dangerous to attempt to make Elizabeth speak to Ralegh in the veritable manner and speech of her time. Scott, knowing that human nature changes little from age to

age, takes men and women as he knows them, and makes them live in a carefully reproduced period of the past.

VII

After Fielding, the novel, as we have seen, worked back in one direction (but along the two paths, of Radcliffe and of Scott) towards Romance. The main road of the novel, however, continued in the direction indicated by Fielding. Its interest was still in the representation of contemporary life. Fielding had worked in an epic field, surveying the world at large. Goldsmith had worked in a narrower range and no less successfully. Like Richardson, he chose a limited area to chart and reveal: a survey not so broad as Fielding's, but more concentrated. His work, which gave an admirable picture of parochial manners, had, however, been limited to one novel.

His successor in the Novel of Manners was Jane Austen. Her work is completely antagonistic to the romance that was so popular in her own time. It has no other purpose at all than to delineate life in one exclusive sphere of society. It is fairly obvious that the artist who works in a narrow space incurs risks which can be minimised when the work is on a big scale. Jane Austen's problem was to make her tiny slices of life interesting. She could not depend on action, of which there is singularly little in her books. She was limited by the four walls of a drawing-room, a domain in which a woman ought to excel, but where, it will be admitted, there is little scope for movement. What then are the powers which Jane Austen in this restricted medium brought to novel-writing?

First, a delicacy of touch which perhaps only a woman could achieve. She worked, as she said, "on a little bit of ivory, two inches wide." She creates her characters by slight and repeated touches, bringing out a line of it here and there through a conversation or a meeting. A typical example is her description of the Bennet sisters in *Pride and Prejudice*.

Secondly, she was a penetrating observer of her little world. Like Fielding and Scott, she knew her world at first hand, and her success was more complete than theirs in so far as she was able to differentiate her characters in one bit of society where a less keen observer would have made them as like as peas.

Even her defects, as, for example, the characterisation of her priggish young men, testify to the fact that she worked from life; for her error is due to an age which seems to have conspired to prevent young people from knowing and understanding each other.

Thirdly, she has uncommon power of detachment. Of the several ways of telling a story there could be only one for the Comedy of Manners. Society must be displayed by one who can lift off the roof and show us each detail of the doll's house within. She hides her feelings and partialities and lets the story reveal itself.

Lastly, she has one other gift that the Novel of Manners needs. Observation must be not only faithful and discriminating, but ironic. Her handling of the Rev. Mr. Collins in *Pride and Prejudice*, or the account of the picnic in *Emma*, are delicious examples of her irony; and there are many others subtle enough to escape the reader whose perceptions are a little tough.

But the crown of her achievement is, that of such "unromantic" and ordinary material as the life of the county, she could make novels that hold the interest of other classes and other times. It was an example that encouraged the later development of non-romantic fiction.

VIII

The high-water mark of 19th-century fiction was reached by Dickens, who probably more than any preceding writer established the popularity of the novel. Like all the greatest of his forerunners he made the novel a mirror of the times, a criticism as well as a chronicle of contemporary life. The kinship with Fielding is manifested in the width of Dickens's interest, and in the exuberance of his writing. He was no miniaturist or etcher, but a painter of huge canvases packed with colour and people. To Smollett—and he acknowledged the debt—he owed the example of a loose-limbed novel style which enabled him to cover a wide ground quickly. This example is most obvious in such early work as *Pickwick*, where the only unity consists of the presence of the same group of characters in a succession of different scenes. A plot would impede the kaleidoscopic progress of his incidents.

Dickens's books are a triumphant assertion that a novel need not depend on its plot, and an equally convincing illus-

tration that the secret of success is good characterisation. We remember his stories not because of their endings, but because of the hosts of real people whom we meet in them. In the best sense Dickens was a journalist: a vivid reporter of everyday life. His early successes, such as the sketches in *Pickwick*, proved to him that people had an insatiable interest in other people, compared to which their interest in fictional plots was secondary. With the journalist's quick perceptions he saw the possibilities of stories of Life in the Big City. London was so far in the grip of industrialism as to make it a city of dramatic contrasts of wealth and poverty, success and despair, kindness and tyranny. Here was a city rich in types and situations, ripe for the chronicling.

He made the novel a report of local conditions and local people among the lower and lower middle classes; a vision of life as it was, neither at the best nor the worst moments, but as it developed through a multiplicity of trivial things through every moment of the day. It would be absurd to say that Dickens made no selection from the available material. He did not, however, select for reasons of *artistic* effect, but rather chose incidents that would "tell." He was the sub-editor selecting from the full report those parts that would make a stir. The write-up may actually go far from all likelihood, as in the preposterous account of the cricket match between Dingley Dell and All Muggleton; but it makes a good story.

It is the power to vitalise people and places that gives Dickens his position in literature. Writing with no particular art, he is able to seize on the essentials of something observed, and make it appear to us who never saw it: Symond's Inn, for example, or the Harley Street of *Little Dorrit*. But the people are the greatest creations. He makes them with the prodigality of some god who has only to breathe on to a bit of clay, and behold, it liveth! They are most effective when they are images of people he knew, or reproductions of himself, as in David Copperfield. Of the hundred quick sketches from life, one remembers such a picture as Mrs. Pipchin "with a mottled face, like bad marble." But when the moralist nudges the observer the picture becomes a little blurred. He then makes people who are reminiscent of the jury in *The Pilgrim's Progress;* people who are types rather than individuals. One feels the laboured faking that just spoils Peck-

sniff and tends to make him Mr. Hypocrisy, that lingers too artfully over Uriah, and makes Mr. Servility.

There is no contradiction at all between Dickens's passionate sensitiveness to wrong and his quick response to humour in life. He was a man of sentiment; and sentiment becomes sentimentality only when it cannot laugh. On moral grounds one dislikes the spectacle of a "drunk and incapable," yet one is aware of the humour of his situation. Though he reacts constantly and deeply to "all things unlovely and wrong," Dickens persistently sees life as a chain of quaint situations. There are occasions when this exuberantly humorous outlook creates a world that is a burlesque of the world he began with (for example, Mrs. Nickleby's acceptance of the lunatic's grotesque offer of marriage). There are times, too, when the moralist gets the upper hand, and "touches up" characters too theatrically (for example, Carker and Stiggins). This inclination of his towards the grotesque has been used by some critics to disparage Dickens. But he wrote fiction; and although he generally wrote from observation of life, he must not be condemned for using the artist's privilege of caricaturing his models. Though his characters often seem remote from what we call reality (and they seem to be so especially when we look at the grotesque pictures of Cruickshank and Phiz), yet in the book they *live*. We can imagine nothing in life as horrible as Squeers, yet in the story even he is credible. Whether they ever lived in life doesn't matter. The novelist's safer course is to draw them as he sees them; but if he can go one better than this by giving life to someone who never lived, he is so much the greater novelist.

IX

The second great figure of 19th-century fiction has more in common with Dickens than is generally supposed. A novelist's outlook has much to do with the consideration of the novel as a craft. The placid mind writes *The Compleat Angler*, the bitter mind produces *Gulliver*, the sentimental humorist writes *Martin Chuzzlewit*. Thackeray's vision was pessimistic; and in consequence his best studies were of the moral weaknesses of humanity. Pessimism is most adequately expressed in satire, but it does not therefore become cynicism. Thackeray's zeal for good was no less than that of Dickens, but it was expressed in a fashion as different as were their

personalities. If he makes virtue lose the battle he is not to be accused of parading vice, but rather to be praised for his courage in revealing life as it is.

In the first place, Thackeray is an uncompromising realist, and complains that "since the author of *Tom Jones* was buried no writer of fiction among us has been permitted to depict to his utmost power a Man." When he called *Vanity Fair* "a novel without a hero" he was not proposing to scrap the unity which a central figure gives to a story. He was declaring against the convention that the novel must portray some paragon who, through every vicissitude, emerges finally as the virtuous and happy man. Arthur Pendennis is cast in no heroic mould; but, as Thackeray maintained, most of us are of the same common stuff. It is his resolute use of realism that makes Thackeray important in the history of English fiction. One of the satirist's best means of holding up to ridicule the manners of his time is that of realism. He has just to describe what he sees in order to make us dissatisfied with ourselves. The other method, that of allegory, often fails to penetrate our thick hides; and to Swift's chagrin, we read his satire as an innocent fairy tale.

Thackeray's accomplishment is an astonishingly all-round performance in realism. First, the characters are presented as he saw them, untouched by sentiment on the one hand, and on the other, free of the touch of caricature which Dickens found irresistible. Secondly, he has the realist's skill of depicting scenes: such as the eve-of-war scenes in Brussels. Thirdly, and this is the most difficult of all essays in realism, he can make most people talk, as we say, "in character." There are many figures in fiction who are credible until they open their mouths: Pamela, for example, or the thirteen-year-old castaway, in *The Coral Island*, who can deliver such speeches as "I find the club rather an unwieldy instrument for my delicately-formed muscles, and I flatter myself I shall do more execution with a spear." Thackeray's people speak as, from their class and appearance, we expect them to do.

To appreciate Thackeray's contribution to the English novel, the student should examine his greatest work, *Henry Esmond*, where, among other technical excellences, he will find two admirable features:—

(1) It is a masterpiece of construction. (His other novels are of the loose-limbed kind.) Despite its great length, it is

a compact study of a triangular problem: Esmond, Beatrix, and Lady Castlewood; and it is as though the very shape of the problem restrained Thackeray from his usual discursive tendency.

(2) It is written in the first person, again one of the hardest of the possible ways of writing fiction. When the author is telling the story he can presume to know everything. When the hero is the narrator he is circumscribed in a dozen ways; and when the "hero" is not heroic, the difficulties are heightened still more. Esmond is handicapped as Crusoe never was, for he is neither romantic nor spectacular.

X

Charlotte Brontë created a sensation in Victorian literature by applying realism to a new purpose. Instead of using it to reveal the deficiencies of social life she used it to reveal those of individual life. Realism had hitherto been the depiction of the outside world. Now it was to become a revelation of the innermost life of thought and feeling. Richardson had experimented in the analysis of mental states; but his work had limitations, the chief of which was that it was not a true analysis. It revealed a girl's mind, not as it was, but as it was conventionally supposed to be. A second limitation was caused by his peculiar method of revelation by letters. The third, apparent in his depiction of Woman, was that he was not a woman.

Charlotte Brontë set out to display a woman's inner life warped and banked down by civilisation. Thus she extended the already wide province of the novel by adding a territory that has since been very intensively cultivated in our own time. In one sense, her method deepens the interest of the novel at the same time as it widens it; or, better, concentrates the interest, so that the world is narrowed down into the life of an individual, wherein, however, are presented all the problems and tragedies of the world at large. To illustrate the nature of the mass, one crystal of society is examined in detail.

Just as Fielding and Thackeray secured the effects of realism by describing the persons and things they saw, so Charlotte Brontë achieved the new realism by drawing upon the bitter experiences of her own life. With passionate sincerity she broke the old convention that a woman starved of

affection must hide her pain. "You held out your hand for an egg, and fate put into it a scorpion. Show no consternation; close your fingers firmly upon the gift; let it sting through the palm." *Jane Eyre* is her masterpiece, not because it is masterly in technique, for it has many crudities; but it is perhaps the most passionately honest novel in English. Charlotte Brontë brought the novel face to face with life. She took the life out of the pretty story of Romance, of Woman as the Queen of Beauty, receiving the homage of a world of jousting cavaliers. Only a woman could have killed that myth.

Charlotte Brontë's defects of technique could not overshadow her sincerity; but she could not link the world of her own heart with the world outside it. She could reveal with astonishing clearness those characters who represented herself, or those whom she had known in life (like Paul Emanuel). The danger of writing one's own emotions and mental experiences into a novel—especially when they are those peculiar to a woman—is that one becomes altogether too self-interested. Whereas in the lyric this personal feeling need have no bounds, the novel depends for its success not on emotional moments, but on a detached view of the world it depicts. Charlotte Brontë lacks this detachment, she is carried away by her one vehement resolve to display a woman's inner life. She knows her own heart and can reveal it; but her knowledge of the world is thin. The heroine is convincing always, but the other figures are often puppets.

George Eliot lacks her passion, though she shares her view of life as an emotional pilgrimage. She is mellower, more patient; and, unharassed by personal feeling, she can detach herself from the life she is portraying. She shared Charlotte Brontë's attitude intellectually, though she never had the same bitter experience of it in life. Therefore she gave a truer account of the emotional conflict, in so far as she related it to the world outside individual experience. Charlotte Brontë, with the exceptions already noted, saw only her chief character dominating the situation. George Eliot, with calmer vision, had a truer perspective. She could draw the other figures as well. She avoided the caricature; and never allowed a deficiency of character to outweigh other possible attractions in one of her figures (for example, Rosamund Viney, feather-headed but beautiful). As a story-teller, she frequently loses

her way; but she presents a world of really credible and human women, and analyses their behaviour with sympathy and common sense. Her influence was a preventive without which "the Woman's point of view" might have ended in hysteria.

XI

The later Victorian novelists continued to resist the attractions of sentiment and romance, and tried persistently to tell the truth about men and women. Meredith pursued the attitude of Charlotte Brontë and George Eliot. He flung aside the conception of woman as a "thing of reverence" and made it plain that she has brain as well as face and figure. A sane and shrewd observer of people, he looked at the world with a comic perception which he describes as "being able to detect the ridicule of them you love, without loving them less." His capacity for this comic perception enabled Meredith to be human as well as honest. If his clarity of thought and his sympathy could have found a style less intricate and laboured he would have been a far greater figure than he is.

Thomas Hardy sought to carry preceding tendencies to a logical conclusion. The novel had shown a frequent waywardness to wander from life to romance. The early Victorians had brought it back by their novel of manners, which had tried to give a broad survey of social behaviour. The later Victorians had gone further and deeper, seeking to make the novel a study of individual psychology. Hardy was unsatisfied[1] with their analysis of character, which, he declared, was limited because the people analysed were drawn from a class that had lost contact with realities, namely the upper class. The novelist could not satisfactorily discover their natures from their actions, since the tradition and breeding of that class made its members carefully screen themselves behind conventions which prevented any action of theirs from revealing a genuine characteristic. The nature of men and women could be discovered only in some medium where they were unvarnished by civilisation, and where their acts usually pointed direct to their motives. His theory echoes Wordsworth's earlier manifesto: and his conclusions are similar. If man's mind and heart are to be truthfully revealed the

[1] One speaks of Hardy here in the past tense as one speaks of a great cricketer whose feats, though he yet lives, belong to a departed epoch.

analyst must take his specimens from primal conditions. Hardy found these conditions outside society altogether: in the untutored countryside which he calls Wessex. The reversion to a territorial name that for so long had been unused very sharply suggests Hardy's conviction that he was in more senses than one charting a new area in fiction.

Briefly his method was to portray man as an elemental in conflict with the elemental conditions of nature, the method of Epic and Drama. Nature is not for him a flat back-cloth before which men and women act: it is the environment, pitiless and vast, which moulds their fate. Nature is not idealised as some soothing, gracious presence: it is a Force which swallows up all happiness and beauty. Unconscious of his doom, man lives his best and honest life; but all is finally engulfed in the wild wastes of Egdon Heath.

He makes Wessex a country "with a soul." It is not a careful guide-book description that he produces, but a piece of earth which the inscrutable gods inhabit. Wood, heath, and valley are described with a wealth of detail, but the detail has a significance which makes Nature an animate Force in the lives of the people who live within it. Egdon Heath, minutely drawn in all its moods and aspects, comes to life and dominates the actions of its victims.

His characters are drawn with the same fidelity and strength. They have nothing of the appearance of puppets manufactured to suit their creator's philosophy. Gabriel Oak and Tranter Dewy, Marty Smith and Michael Henchard, are as essentially Wessex as Mellstock and Egdon. Hardy went to Wessex with a temperament that was pessimistic; but he did not go with a ready-made theory for which he might there find examples and proofs. The earliest story, *Under the Greenwood Tree*, is a piece of lyric beauty which presents the country scene in its innocent cloudless perfection. It suggests the surmise that Hardy as yet had not discovered the Fate that sat brooding over life. All he learned was to come by watching the shadows deepening round the places and the people of his familiar knowledge.

XII

From this sketch of the English novel there emerge one or two points which may be reaffirmed here:—

(1) *What is a novel?* Evidently a discreetly broad answer must be given to this question, such as: a long narrative in

prose detailing the actions of fictitious people. Within that range English novels enjoy an infinite variety; and a definition that seeks to be a whit more rigorous than the kind here given will find itself defied by many of the greatest novels.

(2) *What is the chief element in a novel?*

(*a*) Is it the plot? If so, what of *Tom Jones* and *Moby Dick?* Even in such a well-made novel as *Treasure Island* is it the plot that lingers in the mind, or the vivid figure of Long John Silver? Do Dickens's melodramatic plots outlast in our memory the people who live in them?

(*b*) Is it situation, as in the play?—the construction of dramatic scenes where the characters clash their purposes against each other's or against the Fates? Then what of *Vanity Fair,* and Bennett's *The Old Wives' Tale?*

(*c*) Is it characterisation? Here alone is a factor common to all the great English novels. The novelists who live are those who have made their characters live. By "making them live" we do not necessarily mean reproducing people whom we come across in "real life." The novelist does indeed very frequently draw direct from life, is "inspired" by life. A modern novelist, Mrs. Virginia Woolf, has supplied an interesting note on the way things happen to the novelist. She once met a queer old lady in the train in whom she proceeded to discover a personality that was, for her, an unwritten novel. "Here is Mrs. Brown making someone begin almost automatically to write a novel about her. I believe that all novels begin with an old lady in the corner opposite." But often, too, the novelist makes composite figures by blending the characteristics of many observed persons into the single figure of the tale; and sometimes his creations owe more to his imagination than to observation of any kind. Yet, however they are evolved, the characters must have a life of their own in the pages of the book. They must be instantly and steadily recognisable as specimens of our common humanity, behaving and speaking as their condition and circumstances dictate. The average intelligent reader of the novel can be credited with the judgment necessary to decide whether the characters are so acting and speaking, just as in "real life" a person of average common sense can say whether someone they meet is "putting it on," or in any way behaving artificially. (It is when this judgment is lulled into abeyance by a "rattling

good plot," that some of us accept the fantastic conduct of a best-seller hero.)

When we think of the great English novels we think first and last of the vivid figures whose names we accept as though they had in good sooth lived on the earth.

CHAPTER XI

CONTEMPORARY FICTION: NOVEL AND SHORT STORY

I

A SURVEY of contemporary literature compels the admission that, whatever high merit we find in the new lyric, the new essay, and the new drama, the bulk as well as the best of the literary talent of to-day is expressed in narrative fiction. It is rather to underline this circumstance than to explain it that the present chapter is devoted to the contemporary novel and short story.

Although the description Novel has always been largely a term of convenience applicable to any long piece of prose narrative, yet it was found possible in the preceding chapter to make some briefly comprehensive classification of the earlier novel; but from the wide range of interest and of style which is presented by the novel of to-day it is much more difficult to generalise. This chapter, therefore, will attempt no more than to indicate a few of the salient features of the modern novel, including its relationship to the newest form of fiction, the short story.

Certain differences of technique between the earlier and the latest novel are immediately apparent. The first is manifested in the comparative brevity of the modern novel, and may be described as a more economic use of the materials of fiction than the older novelists could compass. Spaciousness may be as exhilarating in literature as it is in Nature or in architecture; but it is also the most characteristic feature of a wilderness. Particularly among the Victorians was there a somewhat too considerable respect for large dimensions. For their Bloomsbury squares we are grateful; but the similar amplitude of their paintings and their novels is often unimpressive. In one of those vast coronation or Jubilee pictures it is hard to discover any compelling unity among the dis-

traction of hundreds of faces and masses of regimented colour; and not even the familiar compensations of Dickens can always make amends for those crowds of people who swarm across the central interest of the story.

Although economic considerations may in part account for the comparative shortness of the contemporary novel, the prime cause is certainly the novelist's better appreciation of the necessity for a unified story. If a novel is setting out to display a human figure by recording its behaviour in the face of certain incidents and circumstances, its success is not likely to be in direct proportion to the number of events and situations employed. Character is, of course, conveyable through such a diversity; but where even Fielding, Dickens, and Herman Melville run such risks of losing the story, the dangers are multiplied for the lesser novelist. What great argosies of Victorian three-deckers, loaded to the brim, lost their courses and perished!

The modern novelist finds it wiser to respect a Plimsoll line, and to steer by the card. He attempts the no less difficult, and probably more effective, purpose of revealing his characters through a minimum of illustration. What he lacks (or suppresses) of the Victorian talent for depicting a pageantry of figures and events is balanced by a more discerning selective power, which seeks not mere detail but only significant detail. The modern novelist works under a more rigorous arbitrament of the functions of the novel. From Lyly's day onward it was considered proper to provide the story with an accompaniment of philosophic comment, topography, history and what not. In cutting away this undergrowth from the narrative the modern novelist has not only defined his own purpose, but has rightly emphasised the importance to the novel of a clearly-traceable unity of the actual story.

Not infrequently the novelist of to-day limits his survey in both space and time. He selects a definite district for the setting of his tales, Malay, or Wessex, or The Five Towns. Evidently Dickens and Scott very commonly did the same thing, and with the like result of "fixing" their stories; but the second limitation was as unobserved by them as it is voluntarily accepted by many novelists to-day. Conrad's stories, for example, are often worked out within a time-period of a few weeks or even days; and there are some authors (among them Frank Swinnerton and Bernard Gilbert)

who have managed to satisfy the old dramatic time-unity of twenty-four hours.

The characteristic economy of the modern novel is again revealed by the decay in recent times of the popular Victorian habit of meticulous description of scenes and places. Sometimes, however, what is won upon the roundabouts is lost upon the swings; and the very elaborate analysis of motive which is practised by some contemporaries suggests that the Victorian naturalist may simply have been metamorphosed into the Georgian psychologist. When the analysis is done by a master hand such as Conrad, or D. H. Lawrence at his best, it is illuminating and vital to the story; but too often it sacrifices the story to some unhallowed ganglion or complex. In so far as the novelist neglects his first business of story-telling in order to set up as a psycho-analyst he is reverting to the type of primitive novelist who, like Lyly, smothered his tale with irrelevances. The hovering presence of the author ready to pounce upon his figures and schedule their motives in a moment of crisis is possibly more disturbing than the imminence in Victorian novels of the scene-painter ready to squat down without warning in the fairway of the story.

The experiments of the moderns are not directed solely to pruning the older novel of its superfluities. A more penetrating recognition of the weakness of the latter is indicated by the attempt of some contemporaries to make Setting a vital factor in their stories. In the earlier novel the setting is generally there as a decorative background; and, though it be as vividly painted as Dickens's London, it can at best claim to be no more than *appropriate* to the tale. To-day many of the best novelists try to distil the essence of a locality into some tincture which can colour and transform the characters of the story. In this sense, Hardy's Wessex and Sheila Kaye-Smith's Romney Marshes are injected into the blood of Jude and Joanna Godden, determining their motives and their conduct; in this sense Conrad's people and Arnold Bennett's are what they are because they are isolated in Malay or rubbing shoulders together in The Five Towns.

All that has been said here is indicative of the sincere effort of the notable novelists of to-day to give some intelligent organisation to the form of the novel. The diversified interests and vagaries of method expressed in the contemporary novel make it plain enough that there is, happily, no attempt being

made to confine the scope of the novel within rigorous bounds. But, at the same time, there are now generally accepted axioms of novel-writing whose observance makes each novelist an independent conformist. These are, to sum up, that the first business of a novel is to tell a story ; to tell it economically ; and to respect the anti-blackleg convention by refusing to do the work of the guide-book compiler, the travel-film photographer, and the specialist in psycho-analysis.

Something will be said in the last part of this chapter of the subject-matter of modern fiction.

II

The tendency of present-day fiction to submit to severer limitations than the older novelists accepted is yet more clearly discernible in the practice of the short story. This newest kind of fiction is sometimes considered as the filings and clippings left over from the novelist's work upon the larger narrative ; and this idea is substantiated by his fairly common habit of selling these smaller pieces in the intervals between the issue of his novels. In this latter sense only can the short story be regarded as a by-product ; for its composition requires a specialised adaptation of method which some of the best novelists have failed to secure.

The most evident difference between the novel and the short story is of length. The first generally presents the life of its characters in a fairly extensive manner, extensive very often in time, but more especially extensive in its treatment of those incidents and situations which are used to display the characters. It tries to give body, substantiality, to its plot and characterisation. The short story, on the other hand, is, as Stevenson said, " not a transcript of life, but a simplification of some side of life." This phrase suggests the *method* as lucidly as Poe defined the *purpose* of the short story by saying it must leave " an effect of totality " upon the reader, a unified impression of one situation or experience or event. There is much virtue in the title *short* story, inasmuch as it indicates that, unlike the novel (which views life *in extenso*), the story takes the shorter, more intensive view of life, concentrating upon some circumstance or other which is detached from life at large. It sees, as through a microscope, only a small circle of life, but sees it as an important entity.

To achieve this purpose a simplification of the methods of

the novel is essential. The plot is simplified by the exclusion of those accompaniments of sub-plot which give the novel what Mr. W. B. Yeats calls "the shadows on the wall," the means of suggesting *body*, shading, depth, to the story. The action, too, is simplified, so as to bear solely upon the predetermined situation wherein the narrative is to culminate. The persons of the tale, also, are limited to the indispensables, for in the one-act narrative there is no scope for those supers who fill up the background of the longer story; and with the cutting-out of sub-plot, secondary characters are very largely decreased in number. This all-round concentration is reinforced by a constancy of mood in the story. The novel, whether tragic or humorous in its prevailing key, is relieved by periodic changes of mood; but such a symphonic effect in the short story would evidently destroy its effort towards a single impression. Finally, the fact that a story is capable of being written on one single tide of composition, often within a few hours, enhances its capacity to present a unified vision.

All that has so far been said suggests that the short story is bent upon revealing some single arresting situation; that it is taking as few steps as it may to its climax. Its method might be defined, literally, as an adaptation of means to an end. Its whole emphasis is, indeed, upon the *end;* and to get there it adapts or simplifies those constituents which it shares with the novel. It wears its sting in its tail. One reads it with a kind of wariness, knowing that all the exposition is waiting on the climax. There is a Fate sitting at the end of the story devising and twisting all that goes before. Poe's *The Masque of the Red Death*, for example, is governed by that horrible masked figure who exposes himself at the end; and the discovery of his identity is "the incident to which all episode led, which collected like a brass globe all the electric charge of emotion, thought, or vivid impression to be drawn from the story."[1] When the climax fails to take the weight of the story one feels that the spell has been woven in vain. It is this power to pile up the story to its climax that distinguishes the short-story writer from the novelist, whose method it is to lead more gently and more slowly to his final revelation. That very accomplished story-teller Conan Doyle occasionally betrays a failure to give his tales that strongly weighted climax which the short story must have. He suffers,

[1] H. S. Canby: *The Short Story.*

in the Sherlock Holmes tales, from his very ingenuity; for the opening situations are sometimes so cunningly involved as to give them an impressiveness which only a miracle could adequately eclipse in the climax. It is for this reason that such a story as *The Five Orange Pips* goes down by the bows.

The specific unity at which the short story aims requires it to avoid the threefold distribution of interest, among character, plot, and setting, which the novel attempts to carry out. The use of only *one* of these is demanded for the realisation of the "effect of totality." Poe, for example, was most attracted by the story of setting; and makes no attempt in these tales to rouse an interest in character. The persons of the story are purposely left in vague outline, so that attention may be concentrated upon the elaborate setting. Stevenson's *Markheim* specialises in a study of character; and even the strong plot-situation created by the murder is kept severely subordinate to the portrayal of the transformation of a villain into a serene penitent. O. Henry, whose flair was for the story of plot, devotes most of his skill to the masking of some ingenious surprise which is to take us by storm at the end of the story.

The story-writer is like the man who tries to walk along a single railway line; and, even in the short distance he has to travel, a slip is only too easy and irrevocable. He cannot, of course, make a tale out of atmosphere or setting alone, or simply out of character; the setting must contain persons, and character must be related to action; and action again must take place against a background, and must be sustained by some kind of characterisation. The problem of subordinating two of these to the third is an exacting exercise in craftsmanship.

It is this imperative necessity of a clearly marked unity which differentiates the aims of the short-story writer from those of the earlier novelist, and which therefore, for reasons that have already been indicated, testifies his kinship with the contemporary novelist. Yet this unanimity of belief in the importance of a unified story which both kinds of contemporary fiction proclaim does not enable the novelist to master the specialised technique of story-writing. He finds it difficult to sacrifice the balance between plot, setting, and character which the novel needs, but which the story avoids; he finds it hard to throw an overpowering stress upon the climax; he

finds it almost impossible to give up his habit of slow line-by-line building-up of the story. All the minutiæ which he is trained to observe have no place in the short story; and it is because he cannot bear to sacrifice these that his tale often becomes simply a telescoped novel. Besides these more technical incapacities, there is an equally serious defect of focus which often prevents the novelist from making a good short story. To one accustomed to the wider view it is difficult to concentrate upon a narrow survey; he prefers to watch the cascades of Niagara than to scrutinise a drop of water through a microscopic lens. So Dickens, for instance, found it beyond him to circumscribe his attention upon single issues, just as Kipling was unable to carry over into the novel the narrow but penetrating vision which makes his stories masterpieces of unity.

If one finds fault with a Stevenson story it is not without due appreciation of his customary success in both kinds of fiction; and in criticising *The Ebb Tide* cognisance should be given to the fact that the story was written in collaboration. Its opening pages suggest the intention, very proper to the short story, of portraying the diversity of personality existing between three men whose misfortunes unite them in a scheme of common action. Again, in accordance with the principles of short-story technique, they are presently isolated on a lightly sketched Pacific island, and are confronted with the situation which is to separate the sheep from the two goats: that is, the compelling presence of Attwater. And Attwater, whose business it was simply to concretise the differences between the three men, is allowed to run away with the story. The impression of totality which was being rapidly created is broken; the interest is shifted from the study of Herrick's regeneration to the figure of Attwater the superman. The result is a very exciting narrative, but, with the petering-out of Herrick, a loss of that unity of interest which makes a technically sound short story.

What was difficult to the novelists of last century is less difficult to-day in pretty much that proportion wherein the contemporary novel has, in comparison with the older novel, learned to concentrate upon limited issues, to probe rather than to explore. Intensive and not extensive observation seems to be the characteristic of the fiction of to-day, and this makes it easier for the novelist to discern certain detached

unities among his materials which he can work up into short stories. Thus H. G. Wells, from his observations of the world at large, is impressed with the insanities to which jealousy may lead; he selects one manifestation of this, isolates it, so to speak, on a prepared slide in the tale called *The Cone*. Conrad, recalling from his experiences the young sailor's first vision of the romance of the East, feels that here is something too complete in itself to be associated with the other various persons and events of a novel, something too lyrical to be dominated by the larger structure; and from this unified memory he makes *Youth*.

III

There appear to be three principal attitudes which one may take up towards the world he lives in. The first is an acceptance of the whole scheme of things, which may be based upon anything from apathy to a robust determination to make the best of what seems to be our lot. The second is an active curiosity, stimulating us to ponder the problems of behaviour as they present themselves in society, industry, and politics, and possibly compelling us to take some share in the attempt to reorganise the existing order. Or, finally, cynicism, disgust, or disappointment may enforce in us a desire to escape as far as we can from the life that is about us. Thus, for example, in religious practice these different reactions are exemplified in the behaviour, respectively, of the conventional churchgoer, the active mission-worker, and the thoroughgoing mystic.

That mirror of life which we call literature reflects these attitudes with much the same clearness as they happen to be contrasted in life itself. For reasons which history explains these reactions to reality found less expression in early literature than they do to-day; but, from the 18th century on, the divergence between realism and romance has been more and more clearly marked: the cleavage between those books and plays and poems which describe or analyse or defy contemporary life, and those which offer an escape from it.

The desire to avoid the wearisome realities of to-day is expressed in several ways through modern romantic fiction. Wells finds a way to romance in tales about the potentialities of scientific discovery; Maurice Hewlett offers the escape through history; and Chesterton has found a still simpler way out—by contemplating the world as it looks to a man standing on his head.

But the dominant note in modern fiction is realism. This term has to cover several kinds of material, but it relates them together in so far as it connotes stories which are some sort of revelation of life here to-day. Into this category there fall, at one extreme, those stories which are called "sheer realism," the photograph of some part of society developed on the plate of the author's observation without comment or protest; and at the other the imaginative realism of, say, Conrad, which, from the conduct of a typical human figure set in a "romantic" background, most delicately divines the universal motives and concepts of humanity. Between these two opposites there are other methods in the practice of realism. One of the most effective is that which blends observation of a class of society with an imaginative insight into the particular mentality of that class, as in the better Arnold Bennett. If to this blend be added a pervasive ironic flavour, suggestive of a moral purpose behind the writing, the result is Galsworthy's *The Forsyte Saga*. Yet again the power of vivid observation bearing upon a limited section of society may be allied with a comic vision—to produce the stories of a W. W. Jacobs; or with that sentimental outlook of O. Henry or Leonard Merrick which makes their stories convincing pictures of the lives of shopgirls and city-men and painters and vagabonds.

The proportions of realism to romance in contemporary fiction seem fairly to represent the proportions in which we need them in life. Imaginative literature can lift us above the immediate preoccupations of our lives. At its least, in a detective story or a scientific romance, it can refresh and recreate; at its best it can exalt us to some high place where we may reconstruct the scale of values which industrialism is constantly soiling and weakening. The fiction of the realists can, again at its least, remind us that the world is bigger than our own suburb; at its best it may help us to understand the motives of people who do sillier or braver or wickeder things than we.

Realist and romanticist in fiction can between them minister to the necessities of that dual personality of ours which is compelled to live, in one body, in a disappointing world, yet always within sight of happier, unrealised worlds.

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